

*My
Lady
Valentine*



by
*Clavia
Roberts*

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MY LADY
VALENTINE



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*by Octavia
Roberts*

*The A. M. Davis Co.
Boston-Mass.*

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VAIL-BALLOU COMPANY
BINGHAMTON AND NEW YORK

TO MY
HUSBAND

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MY LADY VALENTINE

CHAPTER I

CALEB WHITMAN was in a bad humor. The task of editing the Valentine Special with which *Better Every Week* was planning to celebrate its tenth anniversary, was far from his taste. The theme of this number was to be—as one might surmise—Love; and Whitman did not believe in love, at least not in the violent emotion which the story-writers were so fond of describing.

“Do you suppose,” he said to his friend Radding, who had dropped in upon him one hot August afternoon, “that any man in his senses ever carried on over a girl as these story-book fellows do? Do you think any man ever felt like saying the sickly things the poets write? I can’t see why writers want to turn out such stuff. I can’t see why anybody reads the silly yarns when we print them. . . . How do you account for it, Rad? You’re a philosopher.”

Radding smiled and yawned. He moved out of the direct draft of the electric fan which blew his thin brown hair about his high, intelligent forehead:

"There are three classes of people," he said. "Those who have been in love; those who are in love; and those who hope to be in love."

"What's that got to do with it?" asked Whitman.

"The first class read love stories to recall past happiness, the second to intensify present happiness, the third to anticipate future happiness."

"I must be in a class all by myself, then," stormed Whitman, "for the more time I put in on this bunch of stuff the more determined I am never to be a lover. Why, Rad, it takes a man's reason —"

"Yes," Radding admitted, "it does."

"It warps his judgment."

"It certainly does that."

"It causes as much misery as joy, apparently."

"The evidence is all with you."

"Then what on earth does it give in return?"

"That," said Radding, smiling at the younger man's vehemence, "is what you will some day find out."

"Not I," boasted Whitman.

"You mean that you have set yourself against marriage?" his friend inquired.

"Not at all. I've merely set myself against the emotional state of the story-book lover. When I pick out a wife, I'll do it with my head. I'll look first of all for a rational human being, secondly for a healthy human being."

"You might not like her, you know," Radding reminded him.

Whitman looked up from the manuscript he was glancing over to say, "I don't want to like her in the crazy way these lovers do. All I want to feel is a calm regard. I don't want to have my heart thump every time she comes around the corner. I don't want to be a prey to jealousy every time another man looks at her. Above all, I don't want to sink into second childhood and call her silly names."

"What names, for instance?" Radding asked.

"'Darling.' 'Birdie.' 'Honey-Love,'" quoted Whitman scornfully from the ardent page before him.

"Oh, that kind of names!" said Radding, with a nod of understanding. "What shall you call her?"

"'Mary,' if that's her name; 'Susan' if that's what she was christened; and I shall expect her to call me 'Caleb.'"

"You even let me turn it into 'Caley,'" Radding reminded him.

"You're different," said Whitman, honest affection shining in his eyes. "You're all the family I have, Rad; the best friend I have in the world. Don't let me get started on you, or I'll turn as sentimental as the novelists. . . . By the way, I'm going to try my own hand at a novel this vacation."

"I thought you didn't believe in them?"

"I believe in this one. It's to be the story of a sane courtship, like the one I've been outlining to

you. I've been planning it ever since I was assigned to this job of getting out the Valentine Special. I believe that there are thousands of people who will read my kind of love story with relief."

"You can but try it," Radding granted. And then he asked, "Where are you going on your vacation, anyway?"

"Up in the hills, to a camp I know of — a kind of writers' colony."

"When do you start?"

Whitman did not answer. He was lost in the contents of the last of the envelopes which he had taken up from the great pile before him.

"Got hold of something good?" asked Radding, noticing his preoccupation.

"I've come upon something odd," Whitman explained, raising his eyes for only a fleeting moment from the letter he was reading.

"What is it?"

"A poem, a letter — and a signature."

"Want to share them with me, or am I in your way?"

"Not in my way. I'm going to knock off in a minute and go home with you."

"Is it a good poem?"

"Not very; but it may do with editing. We are going to have two pages of light verse. The idea of this is at least new. Something kind of winsome about it. But it's the personality behind it that piques my curiosity. Take a look at it, Rad."

And Whitman held out a thin sheet of cross barred country paper on which some one had written in a firm hand :

“TO MY UNKNOWN LOVER

“I know not where thou art,
Thy name I do not know,
And yet for thee my heart lives on
Like violets under snow.

For some day thou wilt come,
Dear Lover, all unknown;
And find thy waiting, faithful love
And claim her for thine own.

How shalt thou know me thine?
Remember, dear, by this:
My lilies all will ring their bells,
My foxgloves waft a kiss.

My cedar tree will offer shade,
My vines will dance with glee,
My garden gate will stand ajar —
So loneliness may flee.

I know not where thou art,
Thy name I do not know,
And yet for thee my heart lives on
Like violets under snow.”

“Rather forthputting,” said Radding, handing the paper back.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Whitman. “Now listen to the letter which accompanies it;” and he read:

“Deep Harbor, N. Y.

“Dear Editor of *Better Every Week*:

“Here are some verses that grew in a garden. Please buy them. You would, I feel sure, if you knew what it would mean to me. I must make money”—

“I suppose they all say that,” ejaculated Radding.

“They don’t say it in this way,” said Whitman, continuing to read:

“I must make money—a certain sum within a specified time.”

“Been playing cards or following the ponies?” Radding joked.

Whitman didn’t smile. “Don’t, Rad,” he said. “The writer is in real trouble. Listen:”

“It isn’t easy to earn anything when one lives in a little village that has been asleep these hundred years. It isn’t easy to sell anything in a town where the only demand is for peppermint candy, gray yarn and dry groceries.

“Please take my poem. If you are an old man—I imagine you with gray side-whiskers, a round red face that wrinkles into smiles, and a thick gold watch chain stretched across a white waistcoat”—

At this point Whitman looked up with a smile, as if to invite Radding to share his amusement.

With his red hair, keen gray eyes, straight shoulders, the young editor could not have been less like the writer's vision.

Again he went on:

"say to yourself 'a little encouragement from me may make a difference in this person's whole life.'

"If you are young — but oh, dear, how should I know how to appeal to a young man. I don't know anything about young men. They all left Deep Harbor long ago. The last one that was seen here was in, well, 1812 at the very latest."

Whitman paused for dramatic effect before reading impressively:

"Yours respectfully,
"HENRY B. LUFFKIN."

"Well?" said Radding.

"Well," said Whitman. "Of course no man wrote that note and no man wrote those verses."

"Why not?" asked Radding. "Every village of over two hundred inhabitants has a poet. Deep Harbor has Henry. I can see him plainly. He's pale, and watery blue eyed, with tow colored hair, which he wears long. He ties his cuffs with ribbons. He owes a soda water bill at the village drug store and hopes that you will pay him enough for the poem to square it."

"Rad," said Caleb, "you don't believe that."

"Why not?"

"Why not! Because every word of that letter and every line of that poem was written by a girl. Look here. This *proves* it — it isn't dated."

"Henry wouldn't date it," said Radding. "He'd think it was commercial."

"I can just see that village," Whitman continued, ignoring Radding's chaffing. "A lonely little place, at the end of the earth, with a deserted harbor where no ships ever come; sagging old wharves, ruminating old fishermen, and somewhere in it — this girl, panting for a wider world. You see, I know, Rad, because I spent my boyhood in that kind of place."

"What are you going to do about the poem?" asked Radding.

"I'm going to take it. We can edit it a bit, and stick it in somewhere. At space rates she won't be much richer, but she may be happier."

"Buy that poem, and you'll have Henry on your hands for the rest of your life," Radding warned him.

"I can't take you seriously," said Whitman stubbornly, "because I feel certain that Henry — isn't Henry."

"Do you want to back your judgment?" Radding demanded.

"I'll stake a dinner on it."

"All right, my boy. If I win, the toast will be to Henry Luffkin, village poet."

"And if I win," Whitman laughed, entering into the spirit of Radding's fun, "the toast will be to — Lady Valentine."

CHAPTER II

“**I** LIKE to eat at Tony’s, because he cuts out the din.” As he spoke, Whitman lifted the cover from two of the thick, juicy English chops which were the restaurant’s specialty, and passed one to Radding. “I don’t care to compete with a Hungarian orchestra and a cabaret show when I have something to say,” he finished.

“Have you something to say?”

The question caused Whitman to flush consciously. Radding was so unfailingly logical.

“Nothing special,” the younger man parried; and through the rest of the meal he discreetly confined his conversation to commonplaces. It was not until after the soufflé that he said with forced nonchalance:

“By the way, Rad, it looks as if I’d won the bet.”

“What bet?”

“What bet! The one about the writer of the letter from Deep Harbor.”

“Ah,” said Radding carelessly, “I’d forgotten.”

“Forgotten!” Whitman looked at his friend closely, as if to test his sincerity. He could never be sure when Radding was quizzing him.

"Heard something, have you?" Radding asked.

For answer Whitman fumbled in his breast pocket and drew out a letter which he spread on the table before them. "This came this morning, in answer to my acceptance of the poem," he said.

"What did you say in your acceptance? I'm not sure that doesn't interest me more than 'Henry's' reply."

"Why?" There was a hint of defiance in Whitman's manner.

"I don't know; I just wondered."

"I said we'd give five dollars for the poem," said Whitman. "I wish it might have been more."

"Is that all you said?"

"All except —"

"Except —?"

"I did speak of her" —

"*His*," corrected Radding, plainly enjoying Whitman's resentment at the change of pronoun.

"I did speak of *her* trouble," continued Whitman. "I think I'd have been a brute not to have mentioned it."

"Are you so tender with all your contributors?"

"I never had much to do with the correspondence before," the young editor explained. "They put me on the job because the office is short handed at this time of year."

"Ah, I see. And so you told 'Henry' that you were sympathetic with him in his difficulty?"

"Not that exactly. I told *the girl who wrote the letter* that I hoped the encouragement from the

magazine would be the beginning of better things for her."

"Anything more?"

"Hang it, Rad. Why are you so curious? . . . Let me see. The whole letter was only a few type-written words. Nothing very personal in that, you'll admit."

"Dictate the letter?"

"No, I happened to write it myself."

"I see! Go on."

"Go on! I can't remember what I was going to say, you pick me up so every other word."

"I'll promise not to do it again. What else was in the letter?"

"That was about all, except I did say I knew how he felt (I had to say 'he' until I'd proved that the name was a blind.)"—

"Yes; or the truth."

"And I told her that I spent my boyhood in a village like Deep Harbor."

"Did you let 'Henry' know what a short time ago that was?"

Whitman showed his white, even teeth in a broad, conscious smile, as he met Radding's twinkling eyes across the table. "Rad, I've a guilty conscience," he confessed. "I hope it was fair; but if she could pretend to be a man, I thought I might pretend to be an old one. A fatherly friend seemed to be what she needed."

"Um umph."

"I did not say I corresponded to her picture of

me; but I did say that no matter how gray my whiskers or how ample my white waistcoat, I could never forget my own early struggle for a footing."

Radding nodded. "I see," he said. "Now we've had the prologue, let's have the letter."

"Shall I read it, or will you?" asked Whitman.

"You read it, if you will. That kind of angular hand-writing makes my eyes tired."

"She thought it was manly to write that way," Whitman defended the writer. He began to read the letter, lowering his voice so that the good German family near them could not hear.

"Deep Harbor, N. Y.

"Dear Editor of *Better Every Week*:

"Thank you, thank you for your letter and the money. I can't tell you how I felt when I got the courage to look into Box 37 and made sure that there was an envelope between the seed catalogue and the weekly copy of *The Harbor*.

"All the way down the road I had said to myself 'there won't be a letter there. I know there won't. I don't expect any;' but that was just to keep up my courage in case another empty day awaited me. Did you ever cheat yourself that way when you were young? But when I got to the Post Office there was my letter.

"I made up my mind not to open it until I was at home with the door locked. Then if you had returned my verses, I could have had a good cry. But as I ran down the road, I loosened the

flap, put in one finger and felt the check. I can't tell you what it meant. It wasn't just money. It was HOPE.

"And your letter,—your dear, kind letter. I can't find the right words to thank you for that. With five dollars that I have earned, and a friend, I know I can accomplish anything!

"I hope you will accept a very tiny present as a mark of my appreciation of your kindness, just a simple little gift from Deep Harbor. I hoped if you are old, it might please you. Grandfather used to wear them.

"Gratefully yours,

"HENRY LUFFKIN."

"What was the present?" Radding asked, not attempting to conceal his amusement.

Whitman hesitated. Then he reached into his pocket and took out a soft gray ball, which he kept in his own hands, smoothing it gently. "Wristlets," he said. "Gray worsted wristlets."

"What on earth are wristlets?"

"That shows you weren't brought up in the country, Rad." He slipped the bands on his wrists and held his hands out, smiling. "You can saw wood, milk cows, pump water, do all sorts of things that are best done with bare hands, and yet keep warm, if you have wristlets. I wouldn't take anything for them. Not that I'll use them in New York; but because they'll bring up my boyhood every time I look at them."

Radding examined them curiously. "I see," he said. "I wonder where 'Henry' bought them."

"Henry!" protested Whitman. "Henry! Won't you acknowledge you're beaten, yet? Did 'Henry' knit wristlets? Did 'Henry' write that letter?"

"You haven't proved he didn't, not to my entire satisfaction."

"What other proof do you want?"

"Well, I'll have to think it over. I'll try my own hand at the detective business. Dine here again a week from to-night, and I'll have some evidence."

"Very well, a week from to-night — but Rad, you know more about girls than I do, I've always avoided them. Girl stenographers can't spell and lady contributors cry if you criticize their copy. But tell me this, if Henry *is* a girl isn't he unusually interesting, something out of the ordinary?"

CHAPTER III

A WEEK later, well before the appointed hour, Caleb Whitman was at the table, which he and Radding always occupied, under the cuckoo clock. From time to time he peered intently down the aisle between the rows of tables overhung with festoons of paper flowers, in search of his friend. He neglected to unfold the evening paper he had bought at the door. He ignored the menu which the German waiter had thrust before him. He merely waited, with impatience in which there was no ill nature, but only eager expectancy. And then, at last, he saw Radding leisurely strolling down the room.

"Well," said Whitman, as his friend drew out the chair opposite. "I had about given you up."

Radding consulted his watch. "I am late," he said dryly, "three minutes."

"Three minutes seems an eternity when a fellow is hungry," Whitman defended himself.

"If you are as hungry as that," Radding drawled, his mouth twisted into a whimsical smile, "I'll wait until later to show you what I have in my pocket."

"What is it, Rad? Show it to me and quit your kidding."

"Nothing of importance; just a letter."

"Let's see it. Hand it over."

Radding turned to the waiter, deliberately. "Well, Otto, what shall we have to-night? And, Caleb, what do you feel like eating?"

"I'm not hungry."

"Not hungry? That's good; because this dinner's to be on you."

"Like thunder it is."

"Yes. I'll produce the evidence that wins me the bet with the coffee."

"Then I'll have my coffee with my dinner," Whitman threatened.

Radding was not to be hurried. He ordered the dinner with the care and the interest of a man whose time is abundant and whose palate is discriminating, stopping continually to consult the young man opposite as to details, ignoring the indifferent shrugs with which his questions were received.

When the waiter had gone, Whitman leaned across the table. "I call your hand," he said. "I hold a better one."

"If you have, we'd better wait. Then each of us can enjoy his dinner in the pleasant belief that it's on the other fellow."

"All right," agreed Whitman, with no very good grace; and with well assumed indifference he applied himself to his dinner.

"Want a demi-tasse?" Radding asked, when the end of the meal had at last been reached.

"No, I don't. Look here, Rad, if you think you are teasing me, you are mistaken."

"Teasing!" Radding protested. "Am I teasing? You like coffee, don't you?"

For answer, Whitman held out his hand. "Come on, Rad; what have you? Hand it over."

Radding searched his coat pockets. "By Jove," he muttered, "I must have forgotten it."

"No, you didn't. Look again."

"Ah, here it is."

As Radding drew forth the letter, Whitman caught a glimpse of the writing. "That's not her writing," he said.

"Whose writing?"

"You know — Lady Valentine's."

Radding feigned surprise. "Oh, no, I haven't a letter from 'Henry.'"

"The deuce you haven't. Have you been stringing me for the last half hour? Did you think I was interested in your general correspondence?"

"I thought you might like to see this letter, I confess." Radding's tone conveyed a sense of injury. "It can wait, however, for some other time."

"Of course I'm interested, old man, in anything that interests you," Whitman cried in quick contrition. "Who's the letter from? What's it about?"

"It's from Deep Harbor," Radding remarked casually, adjusting his glasses, "and it's about — Henry."

Whitman's interest instantly revived. "You old fraud," he said. "Give it to me. Honestly, you ought to have a job operating a rack."

"Here it is," Radding said at last, passing the letter across the table, deep-seated amusement hovering in his eyes; and Whitman read:

"Deep Harbor, N. Y.

"Aug. 9th, 191—

"Mr. James Radding,

"Dear Sir:

"In reply to your inquiry concerning identity of one Henry Luffkin, will say that same has resided in Deep Harbor for past fifty years; is church member in good standing, engaged in ferry business.

"Yours respectfully,

"W. L. WILSON, Postmaster."

"Well," Radding's voice recalled Whitman from the perusal of the letter. "It looks as if you paid for the dinner."

"It does, does it?" Whitman retorted. "I've a little evidence myself. I've been holding it back until you produced yours." Whitman reached into his own pocket and drew out a second letter. "This came yesterday," he said. "I did a little detective work myself. I'm not very proud of it, either. If that little girl wants to go incognito"—

"What girl?" Radding asked innocently.

"What girl! My girl; Lady Valentine."

"Ah, I see."

"Here's my letter. Listen to this, and tell me if a ferryman, aged fifty, wrote it." There was challenge in the toss of Whitman's red head.

"What's the prologue to this one?"

"When I thanked her for the wristlets, I sent her a box of candy and a box of cigars."

"That sounds promising. What was the result?"

"This was the result;" and Whitman began to read:

"Deep Harbor, N. Y.

"Dear Editor of *Better Every Week*:

"I'm very glad you liked the wristlets. Have you really wished for them ever since you were a boy?"

"I can't half express to you how much I enjoyed your candy. I never tasted anything more delicious than those chocolates, especially the ones with cocoanut inside. I feel like a person in a story book with such a wonderful gift.

"Thank you over and over again.

"Sincerely yours,

"HENRY LUFFKIN.

"P. S. The cigars were perfectly lovely, too."

Radding chuckled appreciatively, while Whitman's smile was not wholly one of amusement. "Rad," he said, "does the man live who would call cigars 'perfectly lovely' or forget to mention them until the postscript?"

His friend's amusement had not yet spent itself.

"What are you laughing at?" Whitman demanded.

"To think"—

"To think what? Stop laughing."

"To think—to think," gasped Radding, "you should spend your good money—"

"Yes; go on; I never begrudged money less."

"On a middle aged ferryman who happens to have a sweet tooth."

Compassionate silence was the only answer Whitman deigned to make.

At last Radding controlled himself sufficiently to say, "Well, it's plain we shall have to call it a tie. . . . The next step I suppose is to run up there and make a personal investigation. Too bad that you are going to that camp for your vacation. Engaged a place there some time ago, didn't you?"

"Y-e-s, I'm off Monday."

"Well, it makes no difference especially. I can get away myself in another week. I'll hunt up Deep Harbor in the 'Blue Book,' and run up there in my machine. I won't mind the jaunt in the least."

"What are you going to do when you get there?" Whitman demanded. "Nothing to make it embarrassing for the girl, remember that."

"I'll be careful. I expect to get a lot of fun out of it. If the valentine poet proves to be the ferry man, I'll sail with him. If the poet proves to be a girl, I'll persuade her to sail with me."

"You will, will you? Pretty sure of yourself, aren't you, Rad?"

"Yes," Radding admitted, after thinking the mat-

ter over for a few moments; "yes, I suppose that I am; but you see, Caley, even though I'm hard on forty I still enjoy girls. I have none of your prejudice against them."

"So that's it," said Whitman dryly, and he pushed back his chair from the table and rose decisively. "I'm getting tired of this joint," he said. "I think I'll take a walk. I don't know when I've felt so restless."

CHAPTER IV

“ Deep Harbor, N. Y.

“ Aug. 16, 191—

“ Dear Rad:

“ Yes; stare as hard as you will, rub your eyes, put on your glasses. The postmark of this letter *is* Deep Harbor, and the illegible scrawl *is* that of Caleb Whitman, editor and would-be novelist.

“ When we parted Saturday night I fully intended to carry out my plan of going to the camp. Indeed, on the following morning I bought my ticket, seated myself in the car for Utica (which was as far as I could go on the through train) and tried to lose myself in contemplation of the expected joys before me.

“ Then what happened? Why didn't I get to my destination? Why am I not at this very moment sitting near a camp fire listening to the stories of how-the-trout-got-away? I can't entirely explain it myself. The human mind is an intricate piece of machinery, and you know my stupidity is boundless when I am asked to explain the workings of a machine. All I know is that the wheels of the car had no sooner begun to grind under my particular chair than the prospect of the weeks in the camp affected me exactly like cold pan cakes.

“ However, there I sat, letting myself be borne

along nearer and nearer to the bacon, the corn-meal, the old yarns, and the straw bed under the canvas. When we reached Utica, I clambered out, to wait for the jerk-water accommodation that was to take me to the end of my journey. It was hotter than a greenhouse in summer. I made for the magazine stand, bought a copy of our own sheet, just to see how it would strike me coming off the news stand, and — I won't blame it to *Better Every Week* — I fell asleep. I was awakened by the uniformed human megaphone bawling out a train. Looking at my watch I saw that it was time for my own old ice wagon to start into the hills; so, seizing my bag, my gun, my fishing tackle and a few other little trifles, I ran to the tracks, just in time to see a train pulling out.

“‘You can make it,’ a passenger shouted, stretching out a hand for my bag. So I ran, and he stretched, until finally, with his help, I made the step, bags and all.

“‘Well,’ he said good naturedly, ‘that was something of a sprint;’ and together we made for the smoking car. There we exchanged the usual confidences as to politics and occupation. After a while I told him my destination. He was solemn faced. He stared at me contritely. ‘Partner,’ he said sorrowfully, ‘I’ve done you a bad turn. I’ve h’isted you on the wrong train. This here goes west. You’re headed for Jackson.’

“ ‘What’s Jackson like?’ I asked hopefully.

“ ‘Jackson is a fust rate town — electric lights, trolley car, cement sidewalks.’ He stared at me uncertainly. ‘Don’t it make no difference to you where you land?’

“ ‘Not much,’ I said. ‘I’m on my vacation. Is there anything to do at Jackson? Any water there? Fishing, that sort of thing?’

“ ‘Well, no, not at Jackson. But we are only ten miles from the lake.’

“ ‘What lake?’

“ ‘What lake! Good Lord; don’t you know in what direction you are going? Lake Ontario, of course.’

“ ‘Lake Ontario! You have no idea how cool that sounded, Rad. I let my mind drift away for a moment from the hot car, the stale old camp, out, out over the miles of shining blue waters. It sounded good to me.

“ ‘Know any quiet place on the lake where I can board for a week or two?’

“ ‘Well, no place with *style*.’ (You see, Rad, *he* was properly impressed by my general appearance. He saw that I was a man of fashion — which is more than you ever discovered). He hesitated: ‘There’s awful good fishing and sailing at Deep Harbor.’

“ ‘Deep Harbor! If that innocent citizen had discharged a cannon in my ear, I could not have been more startled. ‘Deep Harbor! Deep Harbor! Am I on the way to Deep Harbor? Of all

places on earth, that's the one I want to go to most.'

" 'Well,' he said, looking at me narrowly, as if to detect signs of a disordered mind. 'You're the fust I ever heard say that. Most people wants to get away from there. It's deader than — well, deader than dead fish. It's quieter than an empty house. It's more monotonous than an old schooner when they ain't no wind.'

" 'How do you get there?' was all I said for answer.

" 'You wait two hours in Jackson, and get the dummy. You can't count on it being on time, either.'

" 'I'll wait,' I said; and then, as the conductor approached — he had been delayed by an argument with a mother as to whether a boy of twelve was over five — I said 'Ticket for Jackson,' and all was settled.

" Then Jackson and supper. It was very good, too, served in a neat country hotel. Opposite me was a young sergeant of the regulars (it seems there's a post somewhere in this locality), uncommonly good looking and uncommonly entertaining, so that the time passed very pleasantly before we parted — I for the dummy, he for the army daugherty, drawn by two splendid mules. I hope we meet again.

" Then Deep Harbor in the blackness of a summer evening with just enough light for me to see that the one village street of any pretension slopes

down to the water; that the town stands high on the bluffs; and that it looks out over a great expanse of water.

"As for the hotel, it has the appearance of a moulting bird. My ink is as thick as curdled custard; my pen is as rusty as I am on the war of 1812 (one of the naval battles of that war was fought in this harbor); and my table is as unsteady as a ship without a center board. Not very promising you say? I'm not so sure. I look for adventure to-morrow. In the meantime,

"Yours for the quest,
"CALEY."

"Deep Harbor, N. Y.

"Aug. 17, 191—

"Dear Rad:

"When I tell you that I have not only seen Henry Luffkin, but that I have been talking to him all this long sunny morning; that I have arranged to board with him and his sister in a cottage as white as the lake is blue, doubtless you will think that the quest is over; that I cry 'Nuff,' and that the dinner is on me.

"Nothing of the kind. The chase has just begun. For not even you, Radding, could suspect Henry of writing verse, knitting wristlets or having 'a good cry.'

"I found him in the early morning unreefing the sail of the 'ferry'—a cat boat with a motor

attachment. He is a rugged, squarely built man with an eye, honest and steady and very blue — as sailor men's eyes so often are, from long gazing at sea, I suppose. Suspecting that he was the ferryman of the postmaster's report, I made the sail with him — across the bay to a hamlet that boasts a cheese factory.

"Occasional, reluctant monosyllables, were all I succeeded in drawing from Henry by my efforts at conversation. I own I questioned him shamelessly, veiling my curiosity by frank confidences of my own. I was a writer, an editor, by trade; was he interested in the modern periodical?

"Only in *The Harbor*, a sailor's weekly.

"I supposed a seafaring man like him could not understand what kept men at their pens.

"No, he couldn't. Thought it would be monotonous. With sailing it was different. No two days were alike.

"Had he any children? A daughter, for instance?

"No, he was a bachelor. His sister kept the house. She to be sure was a great reader. When the old post office was torn down, he had fetched her over a wheelbarrow full of old newspapers, and she wasn't done reading them yet!

"'It's the sister,' I determined. But when (the captain having admitted they had an extra room) I went to inspect the cottage and made Sister Abby's acquaintance, I saw I would have to drop that solution of our little mystery.

“For Abby was a drab woman, with capable, worn hands, whose conversation was limited to the frequent repetition of ‘Well, for pity sakes!’ and whose interest was divided between keeping the white cottage white and tending a bed of Johnny-jump-ups, neatly surrounded by variegated pebbles.

“‘This is a beautiful country,’ I said, as she threw open my one window, neatly protected by mosquito bar. ‘I don’t know of any place on the coast with a finer view.’

“‘For pity sakes!’ said Sister Abby.

“‘They tell me the British fired a good many balls into these old banks in 1812,’ I tried again, undaunted.

“‘They drunk from our well,’ said Abby, pointing out to an open well in the sandy yard below.

“‘I should think,’ said I, ‘that you would all turn story writers in this country, with such a background.’

“‘For pity sakes!’ said Abby. ‘Who’d do the work?’

“‘Don’t any of the village ladies write?’

“‘Yes, sir, all of ’em.’

“‘*All* of them?’ This was more than I had bargained for.

“‘Some writes better hands than others, of course.’

“‘I meant fiction,’ I explained, ‘poems, stories, that sort of thing.’

“ ‘For pity sakes,’ said Sister Abby.

“I am sure she will make me comfortable and forgive me anything but setting a sandy shoe on her braided rugs. In the meantime I have taken out my paper, sharpened my pencils and begun the novel. It ought to be easy to write a sane novel in such matter of fact surroundings — there’s nothing about Captain Luffkin or Sister Abby to give a romantic turn to my yarn.

“As ever,

“CALEY.”

“Deep Harbor, N. Y.

“Aug. 20, 191—

“Dear Rad:

“Your letter; with its amazing conclusions, just received. Honestly, old man, I don’t know what has come over you. I used to think you were one of the most astute judges of human nature I ever knew, with more penetration and intuition than any man of my acquaintance. And yet, in this letter, open before me, you say, ‘I am convinced that we were both wrong. Neither a pale faced youth, nor a charming girl wrote the verse and the letters. Abby wrote them!’ And to prove that absurd assertion, you find proof of a poetical temperament in Abby’s love of Johnny-jump-ups; you find evidence of exquisite sensitiveness in a nature that shrinks from the rough intruder (otherwise me) and hides its real feelings and aspirations in the single phrase, ‘For pity sakes;’

and you find a sense of humor attested by the remark, 'Yes, they all write; some writes better hands than others.' Really, Rad, I don't know what to make of you.

"And yet I am no nearer proving who did write those letters and knit my wristlets than I was when I came. Surely it was none of the village girls whom I met on my solitary walks, fresh and comely as many of them are. Lady Valentine wouldn't nudge, nor giggle, nor stand and watch the dummy come in, with her mouth wide open like a slot machine.

"You ask about the novel. It goes haltingly. My hero is made of sawdust, and my girl—I don't know what ails her. Perhaps she is *too* sane. I don't like her, and neither does the hero.

"CALEY."

"Deep Harbor, N. Y.

"Aug. 22, 191—

"Dear Rad:

"Something has happened. I have a clue—very slight, but a clue. I give it to you for what it's worth.

"Yesterday the novel dragged. I can't make my sane hero very convincing. Sanity in love is all very well in real life—I wish there were more of it—but on paper it's dull. I got discouraged and nervous. The hens clucked too loud: Abby said 'For pity sakes' once too often. Sometime in the middle of the afternoon I picked up my

papers, stuck them in my pocket and went forth in search of peace.

“The bluffs which form the shores of the bay are of a soft limestone. They look, from the ferry, exactly like children’s slates piled neatly one on top of the other. I walked along the narrow beach for a mile or more, enjoying the quiet and the smell of the water. Sometimes the beach disappeared altogether, and then I clung to the cliffs and crept along the rocks until I found another footing. Well, when I had done this for an hour, the beach suddenly came to such an abrupt end that there was no hope of continuing my walk unless I wanted to swim! Rather than retrace my steps, I managed to pull myself up the steep cliff — it was some fifty feet high — so it was no easy task.

“When I reached the summit, decidedly the worse for the scramble, there, to my surprise, was a most charming old brick mansion, the kind with fire wings on the sides. I felt as if it were looking at my untied cravat, my stained trousers and my sandy shoes, in dignified surprise.

“‘Hello,’ I said, ‘where did you come from?’ But, the mansion making no answer except to stare harder out of its eight eye-like windows that faced the road, I approached it and stared over the hedge by which it was surrounded. A flag stone walk, sunken and worn, led through tall grass to the loveliest old doorway you ever saw: a door painted white, with a brass knocker, at the top of

long steps crowned by a small latticed porch; all overgrown with some flowering vine, and looking like a sweet face peering out of a poke bonnet.

"There was something about the place that said, 'Nobody at home.' Most of the shades were drawn. The steps were littered with the leaves which drifted from the vine every time a fresh puff of wind came off the lake; so I made bold to push open the gate, walk up the steps and pull the bell, which jangled lonesomely through the silence.

"Nobody came. I grew bolder and pressed my nose to the slits of windows on either side of the door and found myself looking directly into a wide hall, hung with family portraits, furnished in old mahogany. A delicately balustraded stairway wound upward, hinting at bed chambers sweet with lavender and orris. Through an open door I caught a glimpse, a very small glimpse, of the state room, papered with one of those old landscape papers we sometimes see reproduced. I have no doubt it's been there since 1812, and that the oriental figures in turbans, majestically ascending and descending the broad steps, have seen history made.

"I wandered around to the rear of the place. The grounds, some four acres I should say, are all to the back, the mansion itself being comfortably near the front gate.

"A path led me through some funereal evergreens into a thicket, at the far end of the garden, near the road that runs past the rear; and here I

found a summer house, completely concealed in the thicket. Inside there was a rustic table, and a rough seat encircled the walls.

"I seated myself as if I were the owner — I wish I were — brushed off the leaves that covered the table and began to revise my novel then and there. I am going to have my heroine live in that house and see if her surroundings won't humanize her. I am going to write every day until somebody comes home and drives me out.

"The clue! I almost forgot. On the rustic table, among the leaves, I found a bit of cross barred paper, torn across, on which some one had written in angular characters, 'Dear Editor of *Better Every Week*:' I suppose you will argue, Rad, that any one could have written those words — some old lady who meant to subscribe for the magazine, for instance. Think what you will. As for me — well, I'll tell you what I think when I write again.

"Yours,

"CALEY."

CHAPTER V

THREE days passed. Each afternoon Caleb Whitman put his manuscript under his arm and sought the garden. He skirted the curious village in a wide circle, and came upon the red walls of the mansion by the little used road that ran past the rear of its grounds.

The place was still deserted. He was free to drink from the open well, to pick the grapes which were ripening slowly on the untrimmed vines that covered the long arbor stretching from the kitchen door to the stile. Above all he was free to make use of the woodland bower hidden securely in the far corner. Here he spread his papers broadcast and worked on his novel, heavily, laboriously, hour after hour. Sometimes he paused to sigh, sometimes — to listen.

A bird chirped contentedly in a bush. A woodpecker drummed on a tree. Insects whirled faintly in the grass. The wind rustled in the woodbine that covered the bower. Far in the distance a cock sent forth his triumphant cry. And that was all — no other sound of life — for three long summer afternoons.

It was natural, therefore, that Whitman should be startled as he approached the house on the fourth

day, to see a huckster's wagon standing near the stile. As he hesitated whether to turn back, the huckster came toward him down the arbor. "Know when the folks are expected back?" he called, as he caught sight of Whitman.

"I do not," answered Whitman; "I'm a stranger here." Then he put the question that he had hesitated to put to the captain. "Who lives in this beautiful old place?"

"Old Miss Lowell."

"Old Miss —"

"Yes, a maiden lady, Miss Roxana Lowell. She's our aristocracy about here. Brought up proud, you might say. Been here pretty near as long as the house — and that's some time, I can tell you. . . . You can't use no huckleberries, I suppose, if you are a stranger here?"

"No," Whitman smiled; and he waited to enter the garden until the huckster had rattled down the road and disappeared.

"Miss Roxana Lowell," he murmured, seating himself at the table in the retreat. "That's one on both Rad and me." And he began to write, impulsively.

"Dear Rad:

"Alas for Henry; alas for Lady Valentine; alas for romance!"

Then he pushed the paper away. "Old Miss Lowell," he repeated ironically, and lost himself in

reverie. Quite suddenly the garden seemed to him the loneliest spot in the world. The bower where he sat ceased to be a snug retreat; it became simply a summer house, with unpainted, rotting latticed walls, damp and a little cold.

He took up a fresh sheet of paper and began —

“Dear Rad:

“I’m coming back. This place has gotten on my nerves. The novel won’t go”—

Something snapped. He raised his head to listen. Only silence, except for the whir of a thrush in the woods, and the distant plaintive cry of a gull. Again he bent over the paper.

And then the branches of the low hanging trees parted like a screen, the bows snapped back into place, and a girl stood in the archway of the bower.

“Who are you? What are you doing in my summer house?”

The voice was clear and sweet. Caleb Whitman raised his head and looked into gray eyes with long dark lashes, eyes that did not fall nor quiver, though the color that flooded the girl’s cheeks and the quick breathing that stirred her quaint muslin gown, attested suppressed excitement. There was something birdlike in the quick startled glance of her eyes, in the poise of her vibrant little figure as she hovered at the door ready for instant flight. Whitman sprang to his feet.

“Is this Miss Roxana Lowell?”

"No, I'm just Nancy, her niece."

She waited for him to continue, a hand on either side of the doorway barring all retreat.

"I'm a summer visitor," he hastened to explain. "I am staying in the village. I found your house deserted — I supposed for the summer — and I have been making bold to bring my papers out here and make use of your bower for a study. I'm going to make bolder, and ask you — if it would be possible for me to continue to come? Your garden is so large — I've become so attached to it" —

"Oh, I'm so sorry. For you see — you must go — this instant, never to come back."

"Are you in earnest? Couldn't we make some arrangement? I can get letters, you know, to prove I'm a respectable person — that sort of thing."

"You couldn't get letters proving you weren't a man," said Nancy, "and above all things a man is what Aunt Roxana most abhors. She won't have one about the premises. She won't let even a very little boy come to weed the garden. She hires a woman to cut the grass."

"And are men equally distasteful to you?"

"I've never known any, except the village people; and they're quite old. But Aunt Roxana says that men, especially young men, are the cause of all the trouble in the world. . . . And they certainly have been the cause of her trouble."

"We haven't always made a good record for ourselves," Whitman confessed, smiling into the earnest little face across the table. "But if one man would

promise, very solemnly, to try to the best of his ability"—

"It wouldn't do any good. She wouldn't believe you," the girl sighed.

"Wouldn't it melt her heart, ever so little, if I went in and told her"—

Nancy's hands tightened on the arched doorway.

"No," she said fearfully, looking over her shoulder in the direction of the house. "No, you mustn't ask her anything. If she knew you were here, you would have to go—at once."

A smile quivered on Whitman's lips.

"Then I don't have to go—at once?"

Nancy sank provisionally onto the round seat that circled the latticed house, and Caleb, after a moment, seated himself also, on the far end.

"You may stay—just long enough—to tell me what you were doing here when I came."

"I was writing a novel."

"A novel"—

"Yes, and I've been so bold as to put your house and your garden in my story."

"Oh, if Aunt Roxana knew that!"

"Would—it please her? It's such a beautiful old place, I really couldn't help it."

"Please her! She dislikes novels almost as much as men. If she knew there was a *man* in her garden, writing a *novel*"—

Nancy did not try to complete her sentence, leaving it to Whitman to imagine the state of Aunt

Roxana's mind under the double provocation. She lightly touched one of the pages —

"Perhaps, though, this is not a love story? It's love stories she dislikes most."

"This isn't much of a love story," the young man explained eagerly, hoping to gain favor. He moved a very little nearer, and took up the pages as if to outline the plot. "You see, this novel endeavors to deal truthfully with life," he began.

"Yes; that's what Aunt Roxana thinks they fail to do."

"My hero is a sane hero"—

"A sane hero?" questioned Nancy. She had propped her elbow on the table and supported her chin in the cup of one pink palm. Her eyes, soft and trusting, were fixed intently on the young man's face.

"Yes," continued Whitman, his mind wandering from his hero to the way Nancy's black, silky hair grew about her white brow and waved over her little ears. "A sensible chap," he went on automatically, "who doesn't fall in love"—

"Never—in his whole life?"

Whitman stopped short. "I didn't mean to have him do so," he said, doubtfully. "You see he picked out his intended wife with his head"—

"Like Aunt Roxana does her dresses," mused Nancy.

"He didn't think she was the most beautiful woman in the world"—

"Was she?"

"No," the author said gayly, with joyful recognition of the fact.

"What was she like?"

"She was a great raw boned creature, that could walk ten miles at a stretch and leap higher than any girl in the gymnasium."

"That wasn't quite genteel, was it?" Nancy smiled, as if they must be of one accord on that point.

"It wasn't very attractive — someway."

"Were her clothes — pretty?"

The gray eyes dropped to the skirt of her muslin dress, the white hands played with a tiny brooch of pearls at her throat.

"She wore mostly a short skirt and a jumper, and large loose shoes."

"Didn't they make her feet look very large?"

Whitman caught a glimpse of a small foot in a black slipper with a peep of white stocking.

"Yes," he smiled, "they looked exactly like flat boats."

"Was her hair pretty?" A delicate hand smoothed back one soft lock at the nape of her neck.

"No, she wore it short — to save time for more important things."

"What kind of things?"

"I hadn't gotten that far."

Whitman paused, in doubt. But the eager questions continued.

"What did your lovers call each other?"

"What do you mean?"

“What names? Aunt Roxana always crossed out the love names, with a black pencil, in my stories.”

“He called her ‘Mary.’ She called him ‘John,’” he admitted. Then he asked eagerly, “Do you like — love names?”

Nancy’s answer was indirect. “In the Song of Songs,” she murmured dreamily, “the lovers called each other ‘beloved’ and ‘he whom my soul loves;’ and they said — but maybe you aren’t interested? I don’t think King Solomon was a very sensible lover” —

“Yes, yes, I am interested. What did they call each other?”

The girl’s lashes veiled her bright eyes, the roses sprang to her cheeks as she repeated the ardent words softly, for the ear so near her own. “Solomon said to the Shulamite, ‘As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters’” —

“Yes,” murmured Whitman, his eyes on Nancy’s face, and his heart, he did not pretend to explain why, giving an extra beat.

“And the Shulamite said of Solomon” — the girl raised her lashes and spoke clearly, looking straight ahead, “‘As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons of men.’ And I’ve always thought,” said Nancy, “that unless a man felt that way about a girl, and a girl felt that way about a man, it wasn’t love.”

“Nor is it,” cried Whitman, with conviction. He drew a long breath; then he deliberately took up

his papers and tore them straight through the middle.

"Oh," said Nancy, "why did you do that?"

"To mark the end," said he, "once for all, of that sane love story."

"Will you write another?"

"Yes, if I may come here again to-morrow."

She hesitated as she rose. "I don't know —"

"Just once — for luck," he urged.

"Well — just once more."

"And you will come, too?"

"If I do," said Nancy, moving towards the door, and looking back irresolutely over one shoulder, "it will be just to tell you to go."

"Of course," Whitman agreed. And then, as she disappeared, he picked up the scattered papers and stuffed them in his pocket.

"There's no doubt about it," he whispered softly as he left the garden; "I've found you, my little Lady Valentine."

CHAPTER VI

THE Luffkins' twelve o'clock dinner left Whitman free to seek the bower the next day when the sun was still high in the zenith. He told himself that he went early in order to have a long afternoon to devote to the revised version of his book — and there were moments when he believed himself.

When he reached the Lowell place, he slackened his step and loitered by, letting his eyes roam boldly over such portions of the grounds as he could glimpse between the tall, untrimmed boughs of the hedge. He had approached by the rear so that he looked onto the comfortable kitchen porch, the vegetable garden, Nancy's flowers and the clothes line where white fluttering garments proclaimed the family's return. At the turnstile he paused to peer down the arbor's leafy tunnel. Surely, a woman moved toward the gate.

"It's Nancy," he said, and waited.

In another moment he saw his mistake. Though erect as a poplar, the woman was no longer young. Her carriage, straight and unyielding, was that of a past generation.

"It's Aunt Roxana," Whitman decided, and he strolled on his way in some trepidation, just as the old lady turned the stile and walked down the road

in the direction of the village, holding her gray skirts just high enough to reveal congress gaiters and white stockings.

"Well," the young man sighed, "if the angel with flaming sword leaves Eden unguarded, I suppose no one can blame Adam for stealing back"; and a moment after, he found the break in the thicket he had used the day before as an exit, and made his way to the bower.

He had half hoped to find Nancy awaiting him; but the little retreat was empty. The sun played through the woodbine, making patterns on the rustic table and on the round seat where he and Nancy had sat such a short time since. In its rays gleamed a bit of folded paper, on the center of the table.

"A note," said the young man; and his heart sank with foreboding even as his eager fingers reached for it.

"For the Man in the Garden," the note was addressed. Unfolding it, he read:

"If you are in the garden, will you please go away at once, or at least before three o'clock; for at that hour I am coming out with my cross stitch — and of course I can't stay if you are there.

"NANCY ROSE."

Whitman's laugh startled a curious sparrow. "Nancy Rose," he said, "if you'd ever had any practice, I should say you were past mistress of the art of flirting. Did you really think any son of

Adam would obey an order like that?" and he folded the little note into his pocket book. As he did so, he came upon the three letters, with the masculine signature, which had so whetted his curiosity less than a month past. Spreading them out before him, he now compared the penmanship with that of the note he had just found. Again he laughed and shook his head. For all the writer's determined boldness on the pen's downward stroke, the note and the letters were unmistakably by the same hand.

And then, while the minutes crawled toward the promised hour of three, he read all the letters again, trying to deduce the motive that had led the girl to borrow the captain's honest name.

If Nancy had literary ambitions, he reasoned, she would have deluged the magazine with further contributions, once her little verses had been accepted. If she had masqueraded for mere love of adventure, she would have gained more by dropping the mask once her letter had been answered. If she had only wanted money for some girlish whim, why was such secrecy necessary?

He could not guess her motive, but whatever it was, he determined to respect the innocent incognito until Nancy herself should care to throw it aside. In the meantime he would become her friend, he decided; not a shadowy well wisher in the editorial office of *Better Every Week*, pretending to age, but a young friend such as he was sure she needed; such as with care he might hope to become even in the fortnight left him.

He turned to his book. He had worked on the new chapters all the evening before in the expectation that he would have something to show two bright eyes when they peeped through the trees.

At last she came. Her reproachful, "Oh! you stayed!" brought him back from the world of his dreams. She was standing in the door irresolutely, a little beaded reticule on her arm from which some needlework protruded.

"Is it three?" he said, with a poor feint of surprise.

"Yes, it is three."

He pretended preoccupation. "I'm in a very important place in the novel; would you mind very much if I finished a paragraph, just a word or two describing the new heroine, before I go away?"

"N-o-o, not if you'll make haste."

She stood patiently by the door, her black head against the crimson vines. Whitman looked up.

"Oh, if you won't sit down and sew," he said, "just exactly as if I were not here, I shall feel too guilty to linger. And I have just a word more — then I'll be off for good and all."

She dropped onto the seat. After a moment's hesitation he saw her fingers slide into the depths of the reticule and bring forth a tiny square of linen. A moment later bright cotton threads lay on her lap, her needle pricked the pattern and drew the gay strands through the cloth.

The man at the table wrote on, more silent than the afternoon.

"Is she pretty?" asked Nancy.

The writer pulled himself together, apparently from deep abstraction.

"Who?"

"Your heroine."

"I don't know. Ideas of beauty differ so radically."

He bent again over the table. Nancy selected a long crimson thread.

"Does she live in my house?"

"Yes; you don't mind?"

"No, not if she's not that bold jumping woman you described yesterday."

"She's not."

"I hate to disturb you; but naturally I feel interested — in a girl that lives here."

"Yes?"

"Would you mind telling me what color her eyes are and what kind of hair she has, and if she's tall?"

Whitman looked up and met the wistful eagerness of Nancy's eyes.

"They're gray," he said, making a sudden decision, "hazel gray. Her hair is black, black as the black bird's wing; and around her white neck and around her little white ears it looks blacker still."

"I suppose she's very tall," ventured Nancy, threading her needle with a long orange thread.

"Not very. She's small and piquant, quick in her motions like a bird. If she should peep into this summer house this minute you might easily take her

for a wood pecker, with her bright eyes, black head and top knot of scarlet ribbon."

"Does she wear a red ribbon?" Nancy's hand strayed to her own dark hair. "These are berries, rowan berries from the tree across the road."

The author courageously faced his mistake. "This girl wears a red ribbon," he said.

He did not pretend to resume his writing; but, his arms locked on the table before him, he leaned forward watching Nancy sew.

"Would you mind," she said, after another pause, "telling me a little about the hero? I feel interested on account of the girl living in my house, you see."

"My hero is a little shadowy," he confessed; "I can't seem to see him myself. I may sketch from life — though I don't allow myself to do that very often — and give the heroine the best man I know."

"Who's that?" she asked, looking up from her work.

"My chum, Jim Radding," he said, with a reluctance he could not quite fathom for making Radding the hero.

"What color hair has he?"

Whitman laughed. "Rad isn't much on hair. It's, let me see, brown, a little thin, but he brushes it over the bald spots."

"Not bright like yours, then?"

Again the young man laughed. "No, fortunately for his own peace, he's not cursed with a head like a bon-fire."

"I think red hair is cheerful," Nancy said judi-

cially. "I always notice that when any one with red hair appears, interesting things begin to happen."

"Do you?" he glowed. "Well, interesting things begin to happen when Rad comes, too, for he's the best fellow in the world. You might not think so to look at him; his eyes are sad and his mouth droops at the corners a little when he's quiet, but it turns up into the funniest, driest kind of smile when he begins to talk. You'd like Rad, there's no doubt about it."

"Umph, umph," she said dubiously. "Umph, umph, but I never did like a drooping mouth; they're like flags on a still day."

The young man's own lips curved into a smile at this announcement, so gay, so joyous that she might well have likened it to a flag in the wind.

"I'll tell you," he bargained, "as long as I've put your house into my story, I don't know why you shouldn't order a hero to suit yourself. What kind of man do you prefer?"

She considered his offer gravely, her eyes drifting from her work to the face across the table. Then she asked:

"Could you make a hero who would take the lonesomeness out of the world?"

"Yes, I can make that kind of man," was the eager promise.

"Out of everything?" Her voice was wistful, as if warning him he might be promising more than he would find it easy to perform.

"Out of everything — for the girl who loved him."

"Out of moonlight nights in this great empty garden?"

"Yes, even out of moonlight nights in Venice."

"Out of Sunday afternoons, when all the world is asleep and the lake shines blue for miles and miles?"

"Yes, and out of long city streets, when the rain comes down, and the lights of the boulevard shine through the mist."

"Even out of frosty nights, when one looks out of the long window up, up into the sky full of stars, and then back into a great long room, with nobody there but just Aunt, asleep by the Franklin stove?"

"Yes," said Whitman boldly, "for the man would be there beside her, looking up into the stars, too, and they'd stand close to the window so that the curtain would fall behind them, and his arm would go round her waist, and her head would find its place on his shoulder, and they'd discover that the whole wide universe isn't lonely to lovers —"

"Lovers!" exclaimed Nancy. "Is your hero going to fall in love after all?"

"Yes," the author affirmed positively. "Yes, he is. I'm not sure but he is going to fall madly in love."

"What's it like to be madly in love?" asked Nancy with frank curiosity. "How does it differ from friendship?"

"There's as much difference between love and

friendship," began the young man, without hesitation, "as there is between the waters of a fountain, sparkling, leaping, breaking in the air, and rain water standing in a barrel."

"That's a very vivid contrast," Nancy decided after a moment's consideration. "Could you tell me anything more about love? You see, Aunt Roxana holding the views she does, it is the only chance I'm ever likely to have to learn. . . . Is there any more to it?"

"Yes," Whitman asserted, losing himself in thought for a few minutes before speaking, as if to gather his material. "There's a good deal more to it. It's funny, love is; it upsets all the accepted standards."

"How?"

"Well, it upsets all one ever learned about space, at least as I see it."

"For instance?"

"For instance, a mile isn't always the same length."

"Really?"

"No. When it stands between a man and the girl he loves, it's much longer than when it lies between the man and even his very best friend."

"That's very curious," mused Nancy.

"Love does funnier things than that to Time," moralized the instructor, in a kind of growing surprise at the discoveries he was making.

"What does Love do to Time?"

"The very same thing it does to space — it over-

throws all the old gauges. Sixty minutes spent with even the best of friends is about ten times longer than sixty minutes spent with the girl one's been longing to see since day break."

"How do you know all these things?" asked Nancy suddenly.

"How do I know them? Why, why"—the young man flushed and hesitated. "Why, I don't know *how* I know them. I just dug them out of my inner consciousness somewhere, I suppose. I didn't know I had such knowledge myself—an hour ago."

"An hour ago!" cried Nancy; and she rose to her feet in alarm. "Aunt Roxana was to be back from sewing circle at four. She will be looking for me. It must be four now." She peeped up at the sky, through the trees that screened them from the house.

Whitman looked at his watch. "By Jove!" he cried. "It's five!"

"Five!" gasped Nancy, gathering up her needlework. "Five! are you sure, Mr.—"

"Caleb Whitman," he supplied.

"Five!" she said again; and then she laughed in surprise. "Well, then, Mr. Caleb Whitman, it's not only with lovers that time runs fast, is it? for these hours have run fast just for us."

CHAPTER VII

“**I** PRESUME,” began Captain Luffkin in a confidential rumble, addressing Caleb Whitman, “that a young feller like you knows all there’s to know about girls.”

“It’s the last claim I should make for myself,” his companion deprecated, smilingly.

The Captain ruminated, his hand on the tiller, his eyes straying from the face of his passenger to the mark on the shore toward which he automatically steered.

“Knowed no end of ’em, I presume,” he continued, after a pause.

“Considerably fewer than that,” Whitman corrected.

The Captain did not heed the denial. “What I’d like to know,” he began again, puckering his brow in a troubled frown, “is what makes ’em cry.”

“Cry! Do girls cry?”

“One I know does,” the Captain confided, lowering his voice and looking uneasily over the water as if he would guard his confidence even from the gulls. “Cries her pretty eyes out,” he added for good measure.

“Tell me something about her.” Whitman’s manner, in spite of himself, was indifferent; for his

thoughts were far from the good captain that afternoon, circling instead about a leafy nook and a dark haired girl, with a tempting mouth and a piquant chin, whom with stern self denial he had not sought for three interminable days.

"Well," the Captain began again, "I don't want to tell tales, but I suspect I'm responsible for one girl's tears."

"Really!" There was something so absurd in the prospect of sentimental confidences from the gruff old captain, that Whitman found it hard not to smile. And yet one look into the weather-beaten face and honest eyes opposite, sobered him. There was a natural dignity in the ferryman's manner that made mockery impossible.

"You see," the Captain continued, "I'm one of this girl's few friends, having knowed her since she was about so high." (At this point, the Captain measured off about six inches.) "Well, some time back, I seed she was low in her mind, and well she might be, for this town ain't what it should be for young folks these days. So one day when she come to me and asked if she could borrow my name, receiving a few letters addressed to Luffkin —"

There was no question of the passenger's interest now. "Yes," he prompted eagerly.

"I was willing enough," the Captain went on, "for I knowed how strict she was held down and hedged in, and how curious the postmaster was. So, sez I, 'Sure, get all the mail you want'; and I give her a key to my box, No. 37."

"Yes; and then?"

"Well, her spirits come up, and nobody could be gladder than I was. I saw she had something to interest her, and, sez I, 'That's good.' But suddenly the wind shifted and another spell of bad weather set in."

"Since when?" The young man's hand trembled as he rolled one of the cigarettes the Captain scorned.

"Well, I can't say just when the trouble set in, because I ain't seen her until to-day."

"To-day?"

"She crossed with me last trip. I presume she's waiting on the other side now to be fetched back. She never lifted her pretty head from her arm all the way over."

"Didn't she!" The sole passenger's voice was husky with emotion. He looked straight out to sea, wondering if Nancy's fall in spirits could possibly be coincident with the neglect his conscience had dictated.

"Now," asked the Captain, loosening the main sheet from the cleat, preparatory to going about, "to come back to where we started, what makes her cry?"

"What's your theory?" Whitman forced himself to say, overcoming the temptation to tell the Captain what he knew of Nancy.

"I suspect a man," said the Captain with energy.

"A man?"

"Yes; you know we've an army post some ten

miles from here, and I've been wondering if my little girl hadn't gotten in with one of them yellow jackets. I've had several things to make me think that might be so, and that he ain't treating her right. Why else would she want to get letters unbeknownst to those that has her in charge?"

"She might be attempting some business venture," Whitman suggested, "writing for a magazine, selling drawings, something of that kind. Has she literary ambitions?"

"Not that I ever heard of. It strikes me natur' made her too pretty to be a lady writer."

"Does she lack for money?"

The Captain considered the possibilities suggested by this question. "It don't seem likely," he said. "Old Miss Lowell is reputed well to do."

He brought the ferry about and made a neat landing at the port called Fair View, where a group of country folk waited. A quick glance showed Whitman that Nancy was not among them; but just as the Captain cast off for the return voyage, she ran breathlessly down the pier.

"Well," said the Captain, sighting her at the same moment that Whitman did. "Here's my girl. I was afraid she wasn't coming." And he held the bobbing cat boat to the pier with one hairy hand while Nancy clambered aboard.

"I was delayed," she explained confusedly, seating herself between two substantial village women.

If she saw Caleb Whitman, she made no sign of recognition, unless a shy flutter of her eyelids in

his direction, and a cheek that grew a little rosier could be called an acknowledgment of their former meetings.

The man who had denied himself a sight of her for three long days let his eyes rest hungrily on the little figure squeezed between the village women. The Captain was right. She had been crying. Could it be, Whitman wondered, that his avoidance accounted for the change. The thought was so disturbing, so deliciously disturbing, that he refrained with difficulty from forcibly removing the stout protectors on either side of Nancy and taking his place beside her.

Suddenly, as if he read Whitman's thoughts, the good old Captain spoke. "Nancy," he said, "would you mind setting on this side? The boat don't ride right."

The girl looked at him demurely, as the cat boat stole steadily across the bay in the light summer wind. "Wouldn't you rather have somebody a little heavier, Captain?" she teased; and her glance suggested a fat woman with a basket.

"You're just the right weight," the Captain affirmed shamelessly; and he made room for her between Whitman and himself. "Miss Rose," he said formally, when the change had been made, "let me make you acquainted with Mr. Whitman. He's summering with me. Mr. Whitman, let me make you acquainted with Miss Rose. She lives down the road about a mile from the village, in a house you may have noticed, built before the war. A

British ball took off part of the roof, didn't it, Nancy?"

"Yes," the girl nodded listlessly.

"I've seen the house," Whitman managed to say. "I don't wonder the British singled it out. I've done the same thing myself."

"Did you like it?" Nancy asked.

Whitman's answer was prompt. "So much that I haven't been able to forget it for the past three days."

Nancy did not answer but leaned over the gunwale, letting one small hand drag in the water. Whitman leaned towards her. "Nancy," he whispered under his breath, "is something wrong? What's the matter? Won't you tell me? Don't you know I want to help you?"

"Do you?" The luminous eyes that had been fixed on the dancing water searched his face.

"I do, indeed. You must know that."

"Then where have you been?"

The words so innocently uttered, accompanied by a glance from soft gray eyes where tears still lurked, gave Whitman a thrill of joy. "Why, Nancy," he whispered ardently, "you yourself told me I was not to come."

"I hadn't finished telling you so," said Nancy tremulously.

"Hadn't you?" The man's voice was very tender. "I've only stayed away from a sense of duty. I thought about you every hour of the day. I've been trying to find some excuse to appear openly.

Isn't there some way I can meet you with your aunt's consent?"

She shook her head. "Not yet. Not unless I can bring the Great Happiness to pass."

"The Great Happiness?" he questioned.

"Yes." She sighed. "It seems a long way off to-day."

"Won't you tell me what you mean?"

"No. I can tell no one. It's a secret. But once it comes, everything will change." She lifted her eyes to the sky line, like a prophet who sees a vision.

"Is the Great Happiness so much to you, Nancy?" Whitman murmured, struck by the solemnity of her manner.

"It's everything," she said unsmilingly, turning her earnest eyes to his. "It's what I live for. When I think it will never come, my heart is like a stone. When I think it *will* come — and it must, oh, it must — then my heart is like thistledown."

"Nancy," Whitman said, "surely you will let me help you to bring your joy to pass. Have you any other friend to whom to turn?"

"One other," was the unexpected answer.

"The Captain?"

"No, not the Captain."

"Tell me who it is." He did not know that the emotion that welled in his breast was jealousy.

"I can't."

"Is it a man?"

"Yes, it's a man. The best man in the world, I fancy."

"Nancy, are you joking?"

"No, just telling the truth."

Captain Luffkin's supposition of a soldier at the post, flashed across Whitman's mind. "Does he live near here?" he demanded.

"Would you call New York near?"

"He lives in New York, then?"

"Yes."

"A man who lives in New York, who would do more for you than I would."

"I didn't say that."

"It amounted to the same thing." Whitman stared gloomily across the boat, scowling unconsciously at the row of passengers opposite. "What's his name?"

"I can't tell you."

"You mean you don't choose to tell me."

"I mean what I say." Nancy was dimpling. "I *can't* tell you."

"Well," he began after a moment's stormy thought, "it's not my affair, but I have your welfare at heart, Miss Rose" (Nancy started in surprise at the formality of his address), "and so I can't help warning you against confiding in strange men. I hope you understand the spirit in which I say this."

"What spirit is it?" Nancy asked innocently.

Caleb Whitman hesitated, checked for a moment in his moralizing. Then he said with conviction, "It's the spirit of a big brother."

"Oh," said Nancy.

"You're an inexperienced girl," Whitman went on.

"Yes, I am."

"And so I'm going to be very bold indeed, and ask you a few questions, which of course you need not answer."

"Of course not," Nancy disconcertingly agreed.

"And yet — I hope you will answer."

"What's the first question?"

"Where did you meet this man from New York?"

"I've never really met him."

"Never really met him?"

"No."

"Then how can you say that you know him?"

"I know him from his letters — and his presents."

"Nancy!" Caleb Whitman cried aghast; and then he added with conviction, "He's a scoundrel. New York is full of them. Did he see you somewhere and force a correspondence upon you?"

"No," Nancy weighed the question. "I suppose you would say I forced it on him," she said.

"For heaven's sake, Nancy, tell me what you mean. Speak low, one of those women opposite is trying to hear what we are saying."

"I wrote to him first. He answered — very kindly. I sent him a present. He sent me two."

"Nancy Rose, are you teasing me?"

"I'm answering your question."

Whitman was silent a moment, racked by a thousand fears. He forced his lips to ask one

more question. "What kind of a man is your friend?"

"He's very old," said Nancy, turning her candid eyes to his; "that's the only thing I'd like to change about him."

"Old!" The young man by her side gave a start of joyful recognition. He had forgotten the past shadowy acquaintance with Nancy in the intoxication of actual meeting. "Old, Nancy?" his voice shook with eagerness.

"Yes, old and fat, with chin whiskers, a white waistcoat and a thick watch chain. Old and kind. Don't you think it's safe to trust him?"

"Yes," said Whitman softly. "Yes, trust him, Nancy. But promise me one thing."

"Well?"

"Don't make any other friend by correspondence."

"I won't," she promised sweetly. And the cat boat having crept to the pier at Deep Harbor, she followed in the wake of the other passengers, clambered out the boat and disappeared down the street.

"Well," said the Captain as he and Whitman were left alone, "wasn't I right? Hadn't she been crying?"

"Yes," the young man admitted.

"What I want to know," the Captain continued, "is who's making her cry."

"You think it's a person?"

"I'm sure it is. Moreover, I think I've spotted him."

For a moment Whitman feared the Captain's glance, bent upon himself, was accusing. Then the ferryman asked: "See any one loitering on the bank across the water?"

"No."

"Well, I did. And he was one of them yellow jackets. As soon as he sighted the ferry he disappeared into the trees. Notice the little girl was late in getting aboard?"

Unwillingly Whitman was forced to admit that Nancy had been late, and flustered in her manner.

"Well," the Captain finished grimly, "I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts that the yellow jacket has coaxed her over there to meet him, and what's more that it's not the first time he's done it."

CHAPTER VIII

“WELL,” said the Captain with heavy jocularity, extending half a dozen letters to his boarder, “when you get done reading that batch of mail, you might give it to me for ballast.”

From his seat on the Captain’s lawn Whitman smiled, and taking out his knife he slit open the envelopes one by one. The editor-in-chief assured him everything was going well at the office. Rad-ding chid him for his silence and pretended to find it ominous. A real estate broker wanted to sell him some land. A man who owed him money asked for more. An acquaintance announced his marriage.

To Whitman mail had never been very interesting. He had wondered sometimes at other men’s eagerness for letters. With a yawn he opened the last envelope. Then he started, and by the northern twilight he read twice over the words that were written in a familiar hand on cross-barred stationery.

“Deep Harbor, N. Y.

“Dear Editor of *Better Every Week*:

“In one of your kind and beautiful letters, you told me that if you ever could be of service, I was to call upon you. I am sure that you meant

what you said, and so I am turning to you for help once more. Do you think there is any one in New York who would be willing to give money for the following articles (they are my very own. I have the right to sell them):

“One bridal veil of real lace, one hundred years old.

“One cameo pin; head of cherub.

“One bracelet; chased gold. (Clasp broken.)

“One man’s watch; hunting case; gold face; won’t go any more, but might be repaired.

“One pink coral necklace. (I hate to sell this; it’s perfectly beautiful.)

“If you think there is a chance of getting money for any of these things, I will send them to you at once. I must have fifty dollars, and I must have it soon.

“Very truly yours,

“HENRY B. LUFFKIN.”

As usual, the writer had not dated the letter, but Whitman made out from the postmark that it had reached New York some days ago. On the margin his stenographer, Smith, had written: “This letter has been to every one on the staff but you. No one seems to know anything about the writer.” Whitman winced. He did not fancy Nancy’s letters making the rounds of the office. A moment after, he left the Captain beneath the trees, engaged in mending a net, and began to tramp up and down the bluff, looking out over the waters as if the even-

ing breeze that rippled their wide expanse might waft an idea to him for helping Nancy.

At last he went into the cottage, and seating himself beneath the oil lamp, he drew out paper and ink and wrote his friend.

“Deep Harbor, N. Y.,

“Aug. 21, 191—

“Dear Rad:

“I have become interested in helping Henry Luffkin dispose of some heirlooms. I can't buy them myself very well, and I want you to pretend to be a dealer in antiques and buy them for me. Write this letter for me, Rad, and write it at once, enclosing fifty dollars in currency. Here's my check for the amount. 'Henry Luffkin. Dear Sir: The Editor of *Better Every Week* has told me that you want to dispose of some old lace and pieces of jewelry, of which he has given me a description. I am a collector of antiques and I am willing to pay fifty dollars for the lace, the bracelet, the watch and the cameo. I am not interested in coral. You may send your goods to the following address.' Then sign your own name, Rad, and give your address.

“I find this is an ideal spot for my vacation. You will be glad to know that I am making good progress with my novel, although it has taken a more romantic turn that I had planned.

“Yours,

“CALEY.”

The letter finished, Whitman turned to the Captain, who was seated on the other side of the table, lost in his weekly paper.

"Captain," he began, "I have been thinking about what you told me concerning Miss Rose and her mail."

The Captain looked furtively toward the kitchen, where Sister Abby washed the evening dishes, and Whitman lowered his voice.

"If you get the mail and give her the letters," he continued, "you can surely tell the nature of her correspondence."

The Captain shook his head. "No, I can't," he said. "I give her an extra key to the box. She gets there first and takes what's coming to her and leaves me the rest."

"Have you ever seen anything that made you suspicious?" Whitman inquired.

"Well," said the Captain, "a check come once I didn't like the looks of; but she said it was prize money she'd got in some kind of a contest, so I endorsed it and said nothing."

"She's an interesting girl. I wish I might get better acquainted with her." Whitman hoped his manner was casual.

"I wish you might," said the Captain. "I've kind of had it in mind from the first. I done what I could for you the other day in the boat. Don't know as you seen through it or not."

Whitman repressed a smile. "How can I see more of her?" he asked.

"That's hard to say. She don't cross with me more than once or twice a month. She goes to church Sundays, 'but her aunt's always with her. Sometimes she sets in the graveyard with her sewing."

"The graveyard?"

"Yes. Haven't you passed it out on the wagon road near her place? It's pleasant there; quiet and shady, and makes a change from the garden. You ought to go out and see the monuments. Lots of soldiers buried there, that fell in 1812. Summer folks are always interested in the old stones, though the new ones are a sight handsomer."

"A graveyard seems a strange place for a young girl to sit," Whitman mused.

"Well, it's one of the few places her aunt approves," the Captain chuckled, one eye on the paper; "and when you come to think of it, a pretty girl is mighty safe in the company of dead generals and admirals who, even if they come to life, would be kin to her."

Whitman smiled absently at the Captain's jocularity. "I'll go to town and post this letter," he said. "I want to get it off to-night."

On his walk to the village, Caleb Whitman turned Nancy's latest letter over and over in his mind, trying to reconcile his conception of her character with her eager, insatiable desire for money. Sometimes he told himself that the desire sprang merely from the wish to gratify some girlish fancy. Again he was half convinced that she was planning to run

away, to escape forever the tedium of life in the garden; but her own words echoed in his heart, overturning his fears. "I don't want to escape," she had said. "I want to open the gate and let the world in." Was she in debt? The thought was absurd. With her comfortable home, her guarded, restricted circuit, she had small temptation and little opportunity to incur obligations.

"I give it up," said Whitman to himself, at last. "All I know is that I want for you what you want for yourself, Nancy Rose, and that I'll give it to you, if it lies in my power to do so."

.

"Want a lift?"

Whitman started, and looked up through the dusk to see the covered van of the army post which he had learned to call a "daugherty." A young man in olive drab uniform on the front seat had drawn four mules to a standstill and was good-naturedly offering the pedestrian a seat.

"Thank you," Whitman answered, "but I'm only going to the village to post this letter."

"Want me to take it to Jackson?" the soldier asked obligingly. "It will make better time."

Whitman handed the letter over the high wheel. "That's awfully good of you." Then he asked, before the soldier had started the mules on their way: "Haven't we met before, somewhere?"

The man in uniform, who was a dashing, well-built fellow, looked uneasily at Caleb Whitman's upturned face, and muttered, "I think not." Then,

without another word, he put the letter in his pocket, cut the mules lightly with his whip and drove on his way.

Lost in thought, Caleb Whitman looked after the van for a long moment. "I have seen you," he said to himself, "though I can't tell where, for the life of me." And he recalled again the ruddy face, the gay, dark eyes, the splendid shoulders of the man in the daugherty. "I don't know so many army people that I ought to confuse them," he said to himself, "and that particular chap is too good looking to be easily forgotten. He didn't fancy my claiming acquaintance, however. High spirited chap," Whitman concluded. "I don't wonder the 'yellow jackets,' as the Captain calls them, play havoc with the girls, if they're all as good looking as he."

His excuse for the trip to the village gone, he retraced his way back to the cottage, trying idly to recall the identity of the man who drove the daugherty. "I have it," he said aloud, just as he reached the cottage door. "You're Sergeant Wilson, the chap I ate supper with the night I got to Jackson."

CHAPTER IX

“CAN I sell you a ticket for the box sociable, Mr. Whitman?” Sister Abby’s lack lustre eyes shone with something akin to excitement as she reached into the pocket of her apron and extended a bit of cardboard.

“A box sociable, Miss Abby? I don’t believe I know what you mean; but you can sell me a ticket to anything you’ll recommend.”

The afternoon was fair, the sun shone on the sparkling expanse of the lake below the bluffs, the summer wind was fresh and sweet, the morning’s work on the novel had gone well: Caleb Whitman, on his way out of the Captain’s gate, listened to Miss Abby’s plea with good-humored tolerance.

“The money’s for a new carpet for the minister’s study,” Abby explained further. “The tickets are ten cents each. If you draw a good box, you’ll not think they’re dear.”

Whitman produced a dime with cheerful alacrity. “But, Miss Abby,” he asked, “I don’t know yet what I’m in for. Why do I draw a box and what do I do with it when I get it?”

Sister Abby stared at him. “Don’t you know what a box sociable is, and you living in New York City?”

“No,” the young man confessed with becoming

humility, "they have almost everything in New York, to be sure, but I don't believe I ever went to a box sociable."

"Well, they're grand," Sister Abby sighed in pleasant retrospection. "We give one every year on somebody's lawn. There's long tables under the trees, and lanterns strung everywhere. I can't tell you how pretty it looks. Then every girl and woman in the village brings a box with supper put up for two."

"I see."

"Sam Tupman gets the boxes all together and auctions them off. Some boxes fetches as much as a dollar."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, the boys gets excited and bids kind of reckless. When everybody has got a box, they open them up and find the cards of the ladies who have put up the lunches. Then each man finds his partner, and her and him eats supper together."

"Well, that's very interesting. I should think, however, the custom of bidding in the dark, as one might say, would bring all sorts of queer people together."

"Well, you might say it does," admitted Sister Abby; "but when a body is eating, he don't care much who his company happens to be. Then there's ways of getting around it, too. Nearly every girl ties up her box in some special way and gives the secret to somebody particular."

"Ah, I see, that makes a difference."

"The girls ties their boxes with ribbons, and we old folks mostly ties ours with twine. One year I got kind of tired of string, and I tied up my box with blue ribbon. Well, young Sammy Brown bid for it and run the price up to seventy-five cents. When he opened the box and found my name, he looked real disappointed; but he got over it when he tasted my crullers. You think you'd like to come, don't you?"

"I wouldn't miss it for a good deal." Whitman's hand stole to the latch of the gate. The day was fair and time was fleeting.

"Going anywhere particular?"

"Well," Whitman hesitated, "I had thought of going out to the old burying ground — to see the head stones. The Captain said some of them were quite historic."

"Yes, summer folks seem to care for them." Sister Abby's manner had changed from expectancy to mild disappointment.

"Can I do anything for you, Miss Abby?"

"No, nothing particular. I kind of hoped that you'd stop at the post office and see if the lanterns had come."

"Surely, I will."

"If they have, you might just drop in at the minister's — the sociable is to be there — and offer to help him string them up. He's kind of sawed off, the minister is, and he can't reach anything but the low boughs on the trees."

"Surely, I'll offer to string them up for him,"

Whitman promised. Then in order to keep the afternoon free for possible adventure, he added: "Late in the afternoon will do, I presume?"

"Sure, if you've your mind set on seeing the monuments."

"I should like to see them," Whitman stoutly averred. "You see my vacation is drawing to an end, and every moment of it seems precious." He smiled back at the drab figure of Sister Abby. "I won't forget the lanterns," he promised, and he started down the road, his mind drifting from Sister Abby and her affairs to the possibility of meeting Nancy on the road.

If Radding had followed instructions, the letter for Nancy, alias Henry Luffkin (the pseudonym always made Whitman smile) must lie in the post office box by this time. He was determined not to lose the pleasure of seeing Nancy's joy.

He did not know why he found all that concerned Nancy Rose so engrossing. He only knew that her first letter had diverted and amused him; that each letter that followed had quickened his interest; and that since he had met her face to face, his interest had deepened into absorption.

He had made up his mind to find her before the close of this long bright day; and he recalled, one by one, the clues to her possible haunts which the Captain had let fall. It was not patriotic interest, but the Captain's hint that Nancy was often to be found there, that led him to the ancient burying ground.

It lay close to the Lowell place, on the other side

of the wagon road that ran from Deep Harbor past the rear of the mansion. The young man could already discern the arch of the wooden gate which shut the sleeping soldiers from the world. And then he saw what made his pulses leap. A woman turned the Lowell stile, crossed the road and disappeared among the trees in the graveyard. It was Nancy, he concluded; and quickening his steps, he entered the silent acres and looked about him. At the far end of the quiet spot, he could see a woman's form bending over some flower beds.

He strolled cautiously in that direction, saying to himself that he must not startle Nancy. In the hope that she would turn and see him before he was forced to break in upon her solitude, he paused before an old wooden monument, swaying uncertainly on its base, and tried to decipher the inscription. Suddenly, when he had gotten no further than, "Killed in battle on these shores in 1813," a voice behind him asked: "Are you interested in the historic past of our little town?"

With a start, Caleb Whitman turned from the battered inscription and faced — Aunt Roxana. He knew her instantly by her erect carriage, her wide skirt of stiff silk, her white stockings — she carried her dress high to avoid the grass stains.

Caleb Whitman raised his hat and smiled down into Aunt Roxana's face as fearlessly as he smiled at Sister Abby and all the village world. "I am indeed," he said. "I was only wishing that I might find some one to give me accurate information."

The lady hesitated. Whitman had rightly guessed that her vulnerable point was Deep Harbor's past. She unbent enough to say: "This monument was erected over the graves of gallant men who died in defense of these shores," and she repeated the inscription, even supplying the obliterated words of the scriptural line.

"My own people were all soldiers," she vouchsafed, "and did their part by giving their life blood to save this nation."

The summer visitor had an inspiration. "Then you must be one of the Lowell family," he said. "I've promised myself to see your stones. But of course if I am intruding —"

A flush of pleasure mingled with pride swept over the good lady's austere countenance.

"You are quite welcome to view them," she said. "I am glad that I happen to be here to assist you in your studies. The contemplation of the last resting places of patriots must ever be an inspiration to youth."

"Yes, indeed," the pilgrim murmured, as the lady led the way through the long grass to a line of time-worn head stones, with inscriptions faint and illegible.

"This," she said, "was my great uncle, who died in service. This, my grandfather. This a more distant kinsman, who died of wounds," and so on and on she read the names, giving the man by her side, in many a touching anecdote, the history of the past, when Deep Harbor had been glowing with life and high enterprise.

"You have had many soldiers in your family," Whitman said, his eyes searching the road for some glimpse of Nancy.

The lady's head tossed high. "Yes," she said proudly, "we have done our part." She sighed. "As a child I could not forgive myself for being born a girl."

"I see." Whitman was quick to catch her meaning. "You would have liked to have been a general."

"Or an admiral," she said gravely. "Our men fought by sea as well as by land."

She led the way toward the gate, and Whitman followed meekly in her train. There was something in the stately lady's devotion to the past that touched his imagination. For her sake, he could almost have wished that Nancy might have been of the sex out of which generals and admirals are made.

And then, at that very moment, Nancy tripped across the road and entered the gate, a little poke bonnet shading her eyes, a funny pair of old fashioned mits, that displayed her pink finger tips, drawn over her hands and arms.

"Aunt," she called; and then, seeing Whitman, she stopped short, the color sweeping her face to the rim of the poke hat.

Miss Roxana ignored the girl's surprise. As if it had been an every-day occurrence for her to stroll through the graveyard with a good-looking young man in flannels, she said with her unbroken dignity: "This young man is interested in Deep Harbor's

past. I have been reading and explaining the inscriptions."

Her manner said as plainly as words, "The interview is over." And Whitman, surmising that there was nothing to be gained by lingering, lifted his hat and wandered a step or two in another direction, making a feint of further study of the old head stones.

"You are going to the village?" he heard Aunt Roxana question Nancy.

"Yes."

"Have you the list of commodities to be purchased?"

"I think so."

"Read it." Aunt Roxana might have been one of the sleeping generals of her line, issuing military commands.

"'Three pounds of sugar,'" Nancy obediently began; "'pound of coffee, pound of tea —'"

"Half a pound," corrected Aunt Roxana.

"'Go to library. Get copy of Bunyan's 'Holy War.''" Nancy looked up. "That's all."

"The ribbon," Aunt Roxana prompted.

"Oh, yes, the ribbon. What color did you tell the minister it would be this year?" The girl's tone was listless.

"Seal brown. I thought it a decorous shade, that would not attract unseemly attention."

"I hate seal brown," said Nancy wilfully. "Why can't I have a bright color, cherry red?"

"Seal brown," repeated Aunt Roxana, unmoved.

“A yard and a half ought to be a great sufficiency.”

At this point Whitman gave up the hope that Aunt Roxana would go her way. With a slight bow, therefore, he passed the two ladies, and slowly returned to the village, hoping that Nancy would soon overtake him.

“A passing traveller,” he heard Aunt Roxana explain to her niece, as he made his retreat, “commendably interested in his country’s history.”

CHAPTER X

STROLL as slowly as he would, stop as often as he dared, Caleb Whitman reached the village streets without being overtaken by Nancy. Aunt Roxana had decided to keep her at home, he concluded rebelliously, and he remembered with concern how soon he was due in New York.

As he passed the post office, he remembered his promise to Sister Abby to ask for the package of Chinese lanterns. Upon entering the building, he found that the distribution of a late mail was in progress, so that he was obliged to await the completion of that work before he could hope for attention. With interest that bordered on excitement, he watched the Captain's box, and drew a breath of relief when a letter on the granite gray paper Rad-ding affected was thrust into the pigeon hole.

A moment later the postmaster appeared at the delivery window and Whitman remembered to ask for his own mail as well as for the lanterns. The single letter the postmaster produced was enclosed in a granite gray envelope like the one that awaited Nancy.

“New York, Sept. 1, 191—

“Dear Caley:” (Rad had written in his small, crabbed hand)

“I have sent the fifty per instructions. I hate

to take the Captain's bracelet and cameo pin from him. I am sure they were becoming or you wouldn't be so philanthropic.

"Yours,
"RAD."

The note made the reader laugh in spite of himself. "That letter is like Rad," he said to himself. "I'd give a good deal to know if he followed my instructions about writing to Nancy."

"Here are the lanterns you were asking for," the postmaster reminded him, and pushed a clumsy bundle out the little window.

"I'll take them to the minister's and be rid of them," Whitman concluded; and, leaving the post office, he went slowly down the one business street, peering into the grocer's, the milliner's, the store of small wares, in search of a shopper in a poke bonnet. So far she was still nowhere in sight.

It was not until after he had left the bundle at the minister's that he remembered that Nancy had been bidden to go to the library. Where was it? He looked in vain down the long shady street, sloping to the wharfs. He searched his memory. "Where's the library?" he finally asked a solitary passer-by.

The woman pointed to the church. "There," she said, and plodded on her way. "The church?" Whitman called after her. "The tower," she said.

The church did indeed boast a tower, and upon approach Whitman saw that a sign on the door an-

nounced that the library was open Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. He determined to wait here for Nancy. From the windows in the church's square tower he could sweep half the countryside. He entered eagerly, and following the directions of a painted arrow, ran up a winding stair. At the top of the first flight he paused at the door of a small room stacked with books. An attendant rose as he entered.

"I'm a stranger in Deep Harbor —" he began.

"Boarding with the Captain," she supplied glibly.

"Yes," Whitman admitted, wondering if anything above the earth or under the waters of the earth was hidden from the inhabitants of a small village.

"Look around and make yourself at home," the attendant looked up from her crocheting to say.

It occurred to the visitor that this would not take long to do, as the tower room was only some ten feet square.

"Any book you want particular?" the attendant asked.

"No, I just came to make a general survey."

"Like to go upstairs?"

"Upstairs?"

"Yes, the library goes on up the tower; next floor is Religion and Non-Fiction; top floor Juvenile."

"I'd like to look over the religious books," said Whitman.

This pious desire sprang from a sudden recollection of the book Aunt Roxana had put on Nancy's list.

"Shall I go with you?" the attendant asked, as the visitor started up the second flight.

"No, indeed, I just want to look about a bit. I fancy there's a fine view up higher?"

"I suppose there is," the girl conceded indifferently. "You can see out as far as the cemetery, and all over the town."

As these were the points of interest to Whitman, he quickly ascended another flight of stairs and stationed himself in the window. As the girl had promised, his view commanded the country side. He looked down on the beautiful little village, with its white spires and gray roofs peeping through the trees. He identified the Captain's cottage on its lonely bluff. He found the chimney of the mansion where Nancy lived. Dear old town, steeped in memories! He had grown to love it. There was a charm in the sagging wharfs, in the sleepy street bordered with little stores with diamond paned shop windows.

Abruptly his reverie ended. A little figure in a poke bonnet, whose presence lent enchantment to every corner of the town, had just come out of the post office. She was hastening down the street, a basket on her arm, walking rapidly in the direction of the tower. A few minutes later Whitman heard her step on the stair. Evidently she knew the library sufficiently well to come directly to the shelves where the religious books were stacked, for she did not pause on the floor below.

"Oh," she said, breathlessly, appearing in the

doorway and discovering the young man, "I thought there was no one here."

The man in the window seat arose. "I'll go, Nancy, if you want to be alone."

"No," she said, after a momentary pause, "I don't mind; but go on reading, please. I want to look over a letter."

She took a hat pin from her bonnet and slit open a gray envelope as she spoke. Caleb Whitman did not raise his eyes from his book.

"Oh!" cried Nancy, after a long moment, as if she were smothering, "oh!" and again, "oh!"

Whitman sprang from his seat and hurried to her side. The face she lifted to his was bathed in tears. She let them fall quite openly as she pressed the letter to her breast.

"What's the matter, dearest?" Whitman cried, unconscious of using the endearing term. "Tell me Nancy, has something hurt you?"

His hands clenched. If Radding had played false, he would not be forgiven in a hurry.

"Matter!" she sobbed. "I'm just smothering with joy, that's all."

She let him seize her hand, without protest, her pink fingers curling around his, her overflowing eyes on his eager face.

"If you are happy, Nancy," he pleaded, "why do you cry?"

He stooped over her trembling little form, and taking out a generous sized handkerchief, he wiped her eyes as if she had been a child.

"I don't know," she sobbed on a long, uneven breath. "Don't you ever cry when you are happy?" An uncertain smile broke through her tears. "April is the happiest month of all, and she cries all the time."

He laughed his delight in her fancy. "Is it the Great Happiness, Nancy?"

"It's the key to it," she said. "Everything is going to begin now, for me and for those I love."

"I'm so glad, so glad," he glowed, his warm hand enclosing hers. "Will it mean anything for me, Nancy, or am I quite on the outside?"

Two eyes like stars were raised to his. "The gate of the garden will open," she said.

"When it does, Nancy, may I be the first to enter?"

"I want you to be," she murmured. . . .

"Get what you wanted, Miss Rose?" The voice was that of the attendant at the bottom of the stairs. Nancy dried her eyes.

"I forget what I came for," she whispered to Whitman in consternation.

"'Bunyan's Holy War,'" he prompted, and he found the volume on the shelf and gave it into Nancy's keeping before the head of the attendant had more than appeared at the top step of the stairs.

"Yes," said Nancy, handing over the heavy volume for registration, "I've found it."

"Going to the box social?" the girl asked, stamping Nancy's card.

"Yes." Nancy stole a glance at the summer visitor, fumbling among the book shelves.

"That's good," said the attendant. "I hope for your sake the minister doesn't draw your box again. It's awful dull for you to eat with him every year."

"He'll always draw my box," said Nancy in a clear, sweet voice.

"How's that?"

"Because Aunt ties it up herself, and tells him the color of the ribbon. It's the only way she'll let me go. She says she couldn't consider leaving it to chance."

"I see," said the girl.

"Good-bye," said Nancy, with a glance so tender, a face so suffused with joy that it was like an April sun.

"Going straight home?" the attendant called after her.

"No," said Nancy; and her voice rang clear. "I've another errand to do first. I have to get some seal brown ribbon at the store."

CHAPTER XI

“**H**OW much for this box, gentlemen?” Sam Tupman begged, from his stand on a packing case. “Ten cents!” the auctioneer reproached. “I’m ashamed of you, Jim Lyman. There’s more than ten cents’ worth of butter on the bread. Twenty-five? That’s better. Don’t insult the young lady who put up this box. Thirty-five? Come, thirty-five. That’s right, Henshaw. A fellow with a mouth as large as yours ought to pay thirty-five cents for looking at a box like this.”

The laughter that rolled up from the village people who had gathered on the minister’s lawn added to the fun at the grinning country boy’s expense. The bidding mounted. It soared. A box, tied with flaming orange, was knocked down to the boy with the large mouth for *sixty cents!* The minister’s carpet began to assume reality.

From his seat under the trees, Caleb Whitman laughed and enjoyed the fun with the others. It seemed to him that nothing the city offered could compare with this little village fête for pure and innocent enjoyment. The spirit of neighborliness everywhere manifested, the tingling excitement of the young people in the auction, the hearty enjoyment the country found in Sam Tupman’s humor,

all gave to the simple entertainment an air, or so the man from the city thought, as wholesome as the breeze that came in exhilarating puffs from the blue waters of Ontario. He thought of New York, with its chill indifference and hard worldliness with profound distaste.

And then from his seat under the bobbing lanterns which he had helped to suspend from the splendid old maple trees, he turned his eyes again to Nancy, who sat with the neighbors to whom Aunt Roxana had entrusted her, persons whose dress and manner proclaimed for them special distinction in the community. At each successive meeting he had told himself that Nancy's beauty and charm had reached their height. But never before had he seen her with her eyes shining with ecstasy, her cheeks flying banners of joy, her girlish throat encircled by a coral necklace, her happy face peeping from beneath a white lace hat, with a rose tucked beneath the brim. It was plainly Nancy's gala hat, and Nancy's gala day.

The Captain, looking very spruce in his black Sunday suit, his white collar, dazzlingly polished, scraping his ears, leaned toward his summer boarder. "The boxes are going fast; you'd better begin bidding unless you want to go hungry," he warned.

"I've got my eye on one."

Whitman's assurance made the Captain chuckle. "Don't need no looking after by me," he said; and he settled back to enjoy the fun of Sam Tupman's antics.

The auction was coming to a close. Most of the men present were balancing generous boxes on their knees, awaiting the signal to open them, to search for the packers' names.

Sam Tupman looked at the minister, a fat, short, benevolent little man of sixty years, in a rusty coat. Then he picked up a box from among the few left on the table, a box that looked as if it had once contained five pounds of candy, wrapped neatly in white tissue paper, bound sedately with seal brown ribbon; but, alas for Aunt Roxana's decorum, with a big moss rose thrust coquettishly through the bow.

"How much?" said Sam Tupman, omitting his usual raillery.

The minister murmured: "Twenty-five cents."

"Fifty," said Whitman promptly.

The auctioneer hesitated. The minister put on his glasses and looked his flock over to see whence the voice of the interloper came. "Fifty-five," he said at last, with careful deliberation. The Captain shook with inward laughter. "Go it," he challenged Whitman admiringly.

"Seventy-five," said the stranger within the gates.

"Eighty," said the minister.

"One dollar!" Whitman's voice rang out.

The auctioneer paused. "Parson," he cried above the laughter, "if you'd auctioned as long as I have, you'd know when to quit by the ring in the other fellow's voice. That boy ain't got onto his real wind yet."

"A dollar ten," said the minister firmly.

"Two dollars," from Whitman.

The minister wiped his forehead. "You're right, Sam," he called good-naturedly. "I can't tire him out; but I gave him a run for his money."

The worldly phrase from the guileless little minister caused a rumble of laughter from his flock, that died only to rise again.

"Well," sighed Miss Abby, leaning toward Whitman, "there ain't been such excitement in Deep Harbor in many a day. I hope you got a good box. I meant to give you a hint about mine."

Ten minutes later the tables were spread. The young people as well as the elderly folk (age far outnumbered youth in the old town) opened the boxes and found their partners' names.

Caleb Whitman left his seat with the Luffkins and crossed the lawn. "Come, Nancy," he said.

The friends to whom she had been entrusted had wandered away, leaving her for the moment alone. With an adorable readiness, quite unlike the giggling reluctance the village girls were feigning, Nancy arose.

"Oh," she reproached the young man, her lips parting in a smile. "How did you dare?"

"They told me to bid on a box." Whitman laughed down into her upturned face. "If it happened to be yours—" His gesture implied that such being the case, he was not to blame.

"I did not tell you the color of the ribbon, did I?" She waited anxiously for his answer, as if to gather assurance for future defense.

"Certainly not," he affirmed unblushingly, leading her to a seat between two maple trees.

"But," Nancy persisted, "how did you know that it was my box, if you didn't know the color of my ribbon? You haven't opened it to find my name."

Whitman's answer was ready. "I knew it by the sign of the rose," he said, taking the flower from the box, to pin it on his coat. "It's your symbol, Nancy — a moss rose in an old fashioned garden."

When they were seated on the board seat Nancy opened her box revealing a loaf of almond cake (made with orange flower wine) and piles of little sandwiches, tied bewitchingly with cherry colored ribbons.

"I'm sorry for the minister," the man beside her said, making one mouthful of a little square of bread and butter, "he'll miss the cherry ribbons."

"He's never had them," Nancy replied quickly; and then she blushed.

"Were they — for me, Nancy?"

"For the highest bidder," said Nancy. Aunt Roxana's lessons in discretion had not been in vain. Then she added, anxiously: "Those sandwiches look very small, some way, for your mouth."

"They were measured for a rose bud," he replied, looking straight at two red lips.

"The minister never said things like that."

"Perhaps he did not dare."

"No," Nancy decided judicially. "I think it was because he was too busy eating bread and butter. On the way home, though, he sometimes paid me the

compliment of telling me I was a good girl, and a comfort to my Aunt."

"On the way home? Has it been his custom to take you home?"

She sighed and nodded.

"He's not going to do it, to-night. You're going with me."

She looked her longing. Then she sighed again. "No, it would never do."

"Yes," he pleaded.

She hesitated, catching her breath. "Then we must start early — before nine," she decided.

"Well," he conceded, wondering if the earlier hour would appease Aunt Roxana's disapproval.

"What are you going to say to the minister?"

"I'll trust to inspiration. It's never hard to persuade a fat man to sit still. I'll tell him that the privilege of taking you home goes with the box."

He picked up the cover, which had served him for a plate. "Hello," he said, "a New York candy box."

"Yes," said Nancy. "The old man with gray whiskers, of whom I told you, sent me the candy. It was a wonderful box. A revelation in candy, after peppermint sticks in paper bags. I have thought of New York ever since as a splendid box of bon bons, each layer more wonderful than the last. Is it like that?"

The city which had seemed so distasteful a moment before, assumed brighter form with Nancy's words. He thought suddenly of all the treasures

of art gathered there, of the shops and the play houses, the ships on the river, the gayety of the avenue; and he began to tell Nancy of the side of New York that was indeed like a candy box, lined with paper lace, all ready, should she come there, for the pinch of her golden tongs.

"And you will come, Nancy?" he pleaded as the shadows lengthened.

"Maybe," she promised. "Anything seems possible — now." And then she asked, quite suddenly, "Didn't you once mention a man named Radding to me?"

"Perhaps," he said, startled.

"Who is he?"

"There are dozens of people of that name in New York. The one I know is a scholar and a gentleman."

"What does he do for his living?"

"He writes a little and lives on his income."

"Ah!" Her sigh was one of relief.

"Do you write, Nancy? I should think you might, with that pretty fancy of yours." He waited expectantly, hoping for her confession of the authorship of the poem.

She shook her head. "No. I feel things, but I don't draw them, or sing them, or write them."

The long northern twilight grew dimmer. Black night set in. Some one lighted the lanterns, which bobbed from the high branches where Whitman had strung them, like huge fire flies among the trees. A vast content with the present, an eager expectancy of

the future, flooded his being. Life was a spring of living water, to which he pressed his lips.

"Come," said Nancy suddenly. "We must start. I did not know it was so late. Time had wings, to-night."

When Whitman begged for the privilege of taking Nancy home the minister demurred. "You are a stranger to Miss Roxana," he said.

"I spent all yesterday afternoon with her," Whitman argued.

"Well," the minister gave in, "if she says anything, send her to me. If she never finds it out, let it be on my conscience." He patted Nancy on the shoulder and gave his fat little hand to Whitman in farewell. "It was good of you," he said, his eyes twinkling, "to bid so generously this evening in order to help the church."

CHAPTER XII

THE walk home, down the long country road, under the summer stars, was at an end. Nancy paused decisively at the stile. "Good night," she said. "I can find my way in alone."

"I don't like to leave you, Nancy, for that great black, shuttered house to swallow up."

"I'm used to it, Mr. Whitman."

"What will you tell Aunt Roxana about to-night?"

"I'll tell her —" the Cupid's bow arched over the white, even teeth.

"Yes," eagerly, his hand retaining hers.

"That miles aren't always the same length; that the walk to the village to buy brown ribbon is much longer than the walk back in the evening after the ribbon has been untied."

"Ah, Nancy."

But she had darted from him, to run fleetly toward the house, like a Cinderella who hears the strike of the clock. He watched the shadowy form disappear into the deep blackness of the tunneled arbor, hoping to learn through the sound of her great door key in the lock or the flicker of her candle at some window, that she was safe within the lonely dwell-

ing. No such signal came to him, but still he lingered at the gate, his thoughts tumultuous.

To return to the village fête without Nancy, after those wonderful moments together, beneath the old trees, seemed impossible — an anti-climax to an evening that had mounted steadily in significance and enjoyment. How much they had found to say to one another. How much they had left unsaid. He was haunted by the thought that in spite of the long, uninterrupted tête-à-tête, he had let Nancy go without telling her something of the utmost importance. What was it? He searched his memory. Ah, at last he knew. Sweet and disturbing, for the first time the truth swept over him. He wanted to tell Nancy that — he loved her.

His mind leaped to their next meeting, only to be stunned by the thought that his last days in the old town might yield him no opportunity to pour out to Nancy the new and amazing discovery. Against such a possibility his will beat with stubborn resistance, as he pondered the question of how to bring about a tryst. A penciled note, written by the light of a match, and left in the bower, might catch her eye, with slight risk of being found by any one else. He would take that chance; and, having so decided, he strolled down the road until he came to the corner of the hedge that surrounded the estate where the latticed summer-house rose black among the shrubbery. In order to leave no betraying foot-steps in Aunt Roxana's realm, he planned to enter by the break in the thicket.

The trees sighed and creaked as he bent his head to creep under their branches. The woodbine that draped Nancy's bower rustled ominously. The night, under the overhanging boughs of the trees, among the tangle of syringa and lilacs, was an unbroken sheet of black. Suddenly Whitman paused, and looked again. From within the summer-house's inky interior a tiny spark of fire pricked the darkness with an intermittent glow. No man could mistake that light. Whitman stopped short. "A man in the bower," he said to himself, even before the odor of tobacco mingled with the garden scents. A moment after, a burnt out cigarette was flung carelessly through the brush. A man came to the door and whistled a faint bugle call, softly, persistently. Even in the dim light of stars his service hat, his tight blouse and his high leggins gave to his silhouette a distinctive outline not to be mistaken for that of a civilian.

Caleb Whitman could not have taken a step without betraying his presence. Uncertain what course to pursue, torn with vague fears, he waited. The stone nymph with the broken arm was not more silent than he.

Again the guarded whistle fluted through the silence.

"I'm coming," cried a sweet voice, down the gravel path. And now Whitman could not have moved had he wished. His feet, his hands, his very tongue in his parched mouth, seemed paralyzed with foreboding.

The boughs overhanging the path parted wide and Nancy's white form flashed into the grassy plot before the bower.

"Is that you, Bob?" The voice was gay with expectation.

"Yes. A pretty time you've kept me waiting. I was just about to give you up."

Whitman's hands clenched at the easy nonchalance of that reply, and then his fingers loosened lifelessly; for the girl he loved had tripped toward the waiting soldier and flung her arms about his neck.

"Oh, Bob, Bob, precious," her voice came to the man who watched. "I'm so happy. Did you get my note?"

"Yes, I got it, Nance; that's why I'm here. Don't break my ribs even if you are glad to see me."

A primitive instinct to grapple with a man who treated Nancy's love with that easy tolerance swept over Whitman.

"What kept you so late?" The soldier lighted another cigarette. By the glow of the match Whitman recognized the handsome face of Sergeant Wilson with sickening certainty.

"I came home promptly, Bob," Nancy explained; "but some one who came with me lingered at the gate. I did not dare come out to you until I was sure he had gone."

"Well, now I'm here, what do you want? I gave up a jolly good game of pool to come."

The tone was one of affectionate indulgence, with

no hint of a lover's rapture. Its assurance struck a chill to Whitman's heart.

"I wanted to tell you, Bob, that we can send old Goldstein about his business. Your trouble is over. I have the money."

"You haven't!" The soldier seized something which Nancy took from her bosom, felt it, then drew her to him with one strong arm, kissed her soundly, and said: "All I can say is that you're a brick. How did you do it? Appeal to the Czarina?"

"No, that would have spoiled everything. I did it in my own way. I'll tell you how some day. Now go, or you'll be late."

"Let me go then." The tone was bantering, but Whitman winced. "I'll not forget what you've done, Nance. I'll make you proud of me yet. That's the only way I can repay you."

"I've always known you would, Bob," she said, sealing the promise with a kiss.

"Good-bye, kid. I'll be late for 'check' if I don't skip."

He strode toward the path that led to the stile, with Nancy in his wake. Whitman waited until he heard the sergeant's gay whistle well down the road before he moved. Then he staggered into the bower, and bowed his head on his arms over the rustic table, his brain whirling with agonizing, discordant thoughts. How long he sat there he could not remember; nor how long it took him to stumble blindly back to the village, silent and sleeping, and out the country road to the Captain's cottage.

At his step in the house, Miss Abby appeared at her door. "Well," she said, "Henry and I thought you must have got drowned. I couldn't sleep for thinking of you." She held a candle aloft and peered from her room at Whitman, whose step was already on the stair.

"What time does the first train leave for New York to-morrow, Miss Abby?" he asked heavily.

"There's none until night, unless you want to go over to Fairview with Brother Henry on his first trip and catch the interurban to Adams."

"Yes, I'll do that. Something has come up to shorten my vacation. I'm going back to work as quick as I can."

Miss Abby stared. "Well, for pity's sakes," she said.

CHAPTER XIII

THE fourteenth of February had come. The windows of candy shops were stacked high with heart shaped boxes. The girls behind the counters of sweets took orders with lightning rapidity. The florists were hurrying off bouquets of violets and roses which must be delivered before the day died, without fail. Little boys tip-toed up steps, rang bells and ran away, leaving embossed envelopes on the stoops. From the news stands *Better Every Week*, in its new dress, cried to the world in bold, black letters that the Valentine Special was on the market. From its cover, Cupid in a biplane winged a world with his arrows.

"Looks pretty good, doesn't it?" Radding suggested to the young editor, as they paused for a fleeting moment in the subway to ask the girl behind the news stand how the edition was going.

"Yes, Rad, it does. I worked hard on it. Funny, isn't it, that I should have edited a valentine number, when I have neither sent nor received a valentine in my life?"

"How did that happen?" asked Radding, as they found seats in the train.

"You know my boyhood. An orphan on my

uncle's farm, small chance I had of receiving or sending sentimental offerings."

"Caley," said Radding whimsically, "say the word and I'll send you a tribute to-day. Which shall it be,—violets or mixed chocolates?"

Radding's foolery made Whitman smile at his own expense. "The new magazine is valentine enough for me, Rad," he said; "I'm feeling pretty good over it."

He suddenly noticed that a man beside him was lost in the pages of the number. "Funny, isn't it, Rad," he whispered, indicating the reader, "that a bullet headed chap like that likes sentiment as well as a girl? I never get over it."

At this moment, the man took out his knife and cut something from a column of the magazine, which he folded into his bill case before he flung the "Special" down and left the car. Whitman reached for the paper.

"I'm curious to see what caught his fancy," he said.

"Yes," Rad drawled, "when a writer's stuff gets into vest pockets and shopping bags, an editor had better hold onto him."

He watched with interest as Whitman turned the pages to see what was missing.

"What was it?" he asked, as Whitman gazed at the hole the knife had made.

"Nothing." The words came stiffly. "Just"—Whitman turned his eyes heavily toward his friend. "Just Nancy's poem. You know,—Lady Valentine."

He looked steadily in front of him for a long moment, without a word.

Radding watched him narrowly. It was the first time either of them had mentioned the girl in Deep Harbor since that day last September when Whitman had come back, looking worn and haggard. "Don't chaff me, Rad, please. I can't stand it," was all he had said in response to his friend's badinage over his unexpected return. And Radding had respected that request. The subject had been dropped. Now, however, Radding seized the chance to say something that had long been in his mind.

"Caley," he began gently, "I haven't had a chance to tell you that I felt pretty bad over the outcome of our fun. I've never ceased to blame myself for fanning your interest in that girl; for teasing you to go up there."

"You didn't know — You thought it was the Captain who wrote the letters."

Radding shook his head. "No, I didn't. I can't excuse myself that way."

"Then why —"

"I wanted to get you out of the bachelor's rut you were falling into from my bad example."

"It wouldn't have made any difference, Rad. I'd have gone anyway. I was taken with her from the first."

"Are you sure," Radding began carefully, "that there was no mistake? Are you sure that she didn't feel the same way about you?"

Whitman's laugh was bitter. "I'm certain," he said.

"Did she tell you so? Forgive my persistence."

"She didn't have to. There was — another man."

"How do you know?"

"I learned it accidentally."

"Have you ever heard from her since?"

"Early in the year I had a letter from Luffkin — the real Luffkin — corroborating all my fears. A week ago, I had one from her, asking me not to publish her poem, written as usual under the Captain's name. The poem was already in press and had to go through, of course. I wrote a line telling her so, and that's the end of it all."

"Let me see the Captain's letter some time, if you haven't destroyed it," Radding suggested.

Whitman promptly produced it from his pocket. "I saved it," he said, "to keep me from indulging in any more foolish hopes."

Rad pinched on his glasses and read:

"Deep Harbor, N. Y.

"Jan. 3, 191—

"Friend Whitman:

"Concerning suspicions I had last summer of a certain party, would say all come out well long since, as you have probably heard. My girl kept her secret well, and Aunt was about struck dead when the sergeant walked in on her and told her that he'd got a commission. Aunt's head was pretty high before. Now, I'm thinking, it won't never come down no more. With a lieutenant in

the family, things are settling back like they used to be.

"Hoping this finds you in health.

"Respectfully,

"HENRY B. LUFFKIN."

"Was the sergeant the fellow?" asked Radding, when he had come to the Captain's carefully lettered signature.

Whitman nodded, his face set.

Further comment was impossible, for at this moment the train pulled into Radding's station.

"Wait for me at your office," he said, as he rose. "I'll be there about five."

"It's a half holiday," Whitman reminded him.

"Better yet. Make it two, then. We'll do something together." And Radding was gone.

It was a quarter after two by the office clock. Whitman was about to close his desk and give Radding up, when the janitor, a draggled individual with the discouraged slant of a worn out broom, appeared in the door and croaked: "Party outside asking for a Mr. Radding. There's no such person here, is there?"

"He'll be here any minute," Whitman replied. "Show the visitor in. I'll talk to him."

The janitor ambled down the long hall in the direction of the waiting room. Whitman once more took up the proofs of his novel, which he had laid aside preparatory to leaving. The visitor's coming gave

him fresh hope that Radding would finally appear. Engrossed in his work, Whitman had forgotten the invitation he had sent by the janitor, when he was aroused by a timid knock on the door. It was followed, upon his giving permission to enter, by the turning of the knob, the soft rustle of a woman's garments, and an exclamation that was stifled almost before it escaped.

The young man raised his eyes. In the doorway stood a girl, in a fur hat and sable furs upon which the snow had frozen in glistening crystals. At the sight of Whitman, her face blanched beneath her veil.

"Nancy!" Whitman breathed, doubting the evidence of his eyes.

It was some moments before she attempted to speak. Then her lips moved stiffly:

"Who are you?" she said. "Why are you here?"

Whitman got to his feet. He did not move toward her, but steadying himself by a hand that found his desk, he spoke, the length of the room between them:

"I'm the Editor of *Better Every Week*, Nancy."

"You deceived me, then. If I'd known —"

The young man finished the sentence for her, bitterly:

"You mean if you'd known that, you wouldn't have come?"

"No, I would not have come."

"Are you sorry, Nancy, to find me here?"

"I'm sorry that the old man in whom you let me believe is not a reality. I liked to think that I had a friend."

"You surely know that I am your friend, Nancy; a thousand fold more sincerely your friend than he could ever have been — had he existed. I was your friend from the beginning. I am your friend now."

To these protestations she made no answer.

"If Mr. Radding is not here," she said at last, with an effort to control her voice, "I think that I must go."

The dignity inherited from a long line of gentlewomen showed in the slight inclination of her head in his direction.

"He'll be here," Whitman promised, recklessly, feeling anything was more bearable than her going. "What did you want of him, Nancy?"

"I wanted to buy back some heirlooms I sold him when I was in trouble. Bob won't hear of anything else, now that our necessity is over."

"Is Bob — Sergeant Wilson?"

"He was; but the War Department has allowed him to change his name."

"Is he with you?"

"Yes. He came to get measured for some new uniforms, and I came with him. He's to call here for me and take me back to the hotel."

"Nancy," Whitman pleaded, looking down at her averted eyes, "tell me, are you happy? I can bear anything if you are."

"I have everything to make me happy," Nancy

evaded him. "Aunt Roxana is radiant." She smiled faintly. "She is going to give a ball to the whole regiment. She is so happy she has even forgiven me about the poem."

"The poem?"

"The one you bought."

"What was there to forgive?"

"It was her heart's secret. She had written it when she was a girl like me. I did not know that, of course, when I sent it to you. I found it in a secret drawer. I thought some one long dead had written it."

It was Whitman's turn to be silent. When he spoke his voice trembled. "You can't realize, Nancy, what it means to me to learn that those verses were not yours. I seem to have lost my last illusion."

"You mean it was wicked to sell them? That's what Aunt said until she learned what I wanted to do with the money."

"Of course I don't mean any such thing," Whitman protested, indignantly. "I mean that I loved to think that it was your heart that waited there 'Like violets under snow.'"

Nancy shook her head. "I didn't write them, but I loved them. They taught me something that has helped me to go on."

"What did they teach you, Nancy?"

"They taught me that love is always answered by love, at last. Aunt Roxana never had a lover, but Bob came, and filled her heart. Perhaps," the

sweet voice quavered, "it will be Bob's son who will fill mine."

Whitman's voice was so tense it sounded hard.

"Nancy," he said sternly, "did you marry without loving?"

"Marry!" A deep flush swept the pale cheeks, to the brim of the little fur hat. "I am not married."

"Not yet?"

"Certainly not."

"But you have a lover?"

The ghost of the old Nancy flickered in her uncertain smile. "I'm not sure," she breathed.

"Please don't tease me, Nancy." A hot hand locked over hers. "Once for all, tell me who it was that came to you in the bower, that you kissed, that you let clasp you in his arms."

"Why, Mr. Whitman," she laughed on a long sobbing breath, while one little hand stole contritely into his. "Didn't you know? That was Bob, my brother."

"Your brother!"

Without waiting for another word; without asking where he stood in her affections, Whitman gathered the slight figure, muffled in furs, tight within his arms. He kissed the beautiful eyes until they laughed up at him once more. He kissed the cheeks until they bloomed. He kissed the mouth until the Cupid's bow arched in its old, playful smile.

"Why, Caleb," she gasped between his kisses, "didn't you really know?"

"Know! Did you suppose if I had known I should have left Deep Harbor without one word, after that last night together? What did you think of me, Nancy? What could you have thought of me?"

The dark head drooped against his shoulder, as if glad to be at rest. "At first I thought all that Aunt had said of men was true. Then I found the moss rose I had given you, in the bower. I knew you must have seen me meet Bob, and I thought you could not have understood. And so, the moment the secret was out and Bob had his commission, I asked Captain Luffkin to write you — and still you did not come. Didn't you get the letter?"

"Get the letter!" roared Whitman. "Of course I got the letter. It destroyed the last spark of hope within me. The blundering old walrus! He never once mentioned your relationship to the sergeant. If he steered a boat with no more skill than he writes letters, he'd be aground in five minutes."

Nancy laughed softly. "It's all over now," she sighed contentedly. "My troubles and yours have vanished, as well as Bob's."

"Did Bob have such heavy troubles, dear?"

"Yes; I forgot you didn't know. They explain everything. You see, Bob had been in the Academy — West Point, you know — but something happened, and they — dismissed him."

"That was hard, wasn't it, Sweetheart?"

"Aunt Roxana wrote him a terrible letter, and told him that he had disgraced his forefathers; that he must never enter our gate again."

"Poor chap! Pretty rough on him, wasn't it?"

"I used to think so, but it made a man of him. He enlisted in the ranks under the name of Wilson, and won his commission the very year his class graduated. In all that time Aunt Roxana had not heard one word of his whereabouts. I alone knew the secret. Oh! If you had seen her the day when Bob threw open the garden gate and strode up the walk with his head as high as hers, the straps on his shoulders."

"She was pleased, was she, darling?"

"Pleased!" Nancy ejaculated, smiling. "She's never talked of anything else since. She's never looked at another person. And to think," she sighed reminiscently, "how near he came to failing. If it hadn't been for your buying my poem and your telling Mr. Radding, the collector, about my things, Bob might never have got his commission."

"What had that to do with it, my own?"

"Ah, you don't know. There was an old debt from Academy days that had to be paid. A cruel creature named Goldstein found out that Bob was in the ranks, and he threatened to tell the commanding officer the whole story, unless he was paid. It was life or death with us at that crucial time, to get the money. Bob raised all that he could —"

"Then my little general took a hand."

"What sweet things you always say." Her cheek caressed his sleeve. "I missed you so when you went away. It was winter in the garden and winter in my heart."

"It's spring now, beloved, forever and forever."

A discreet knock on the wall of the corridor, well outside the open door, caused Nancy to retreat from Whitman's arms and hurriedly put her hat to rights.

"Yes?" shouted Whitman fiercely, peering out to find the intruder.

The janitor coughed and smiled apologetically, "Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Whitman, but this note just came for you."

Whitman opened it, while his arm again drew Nancy close.

"Dear Caley:" (He read)

"I hope the 'Valentine' I ventured to send met with your approval. I'm afraid the dinner is on me, after all. I have ordered covers laid for four at Delmonico's at eight. I insist that the sergeant come, to keep me company.

"If her name is Mary, call her Mary; if she was christened Susan, call her Susan."

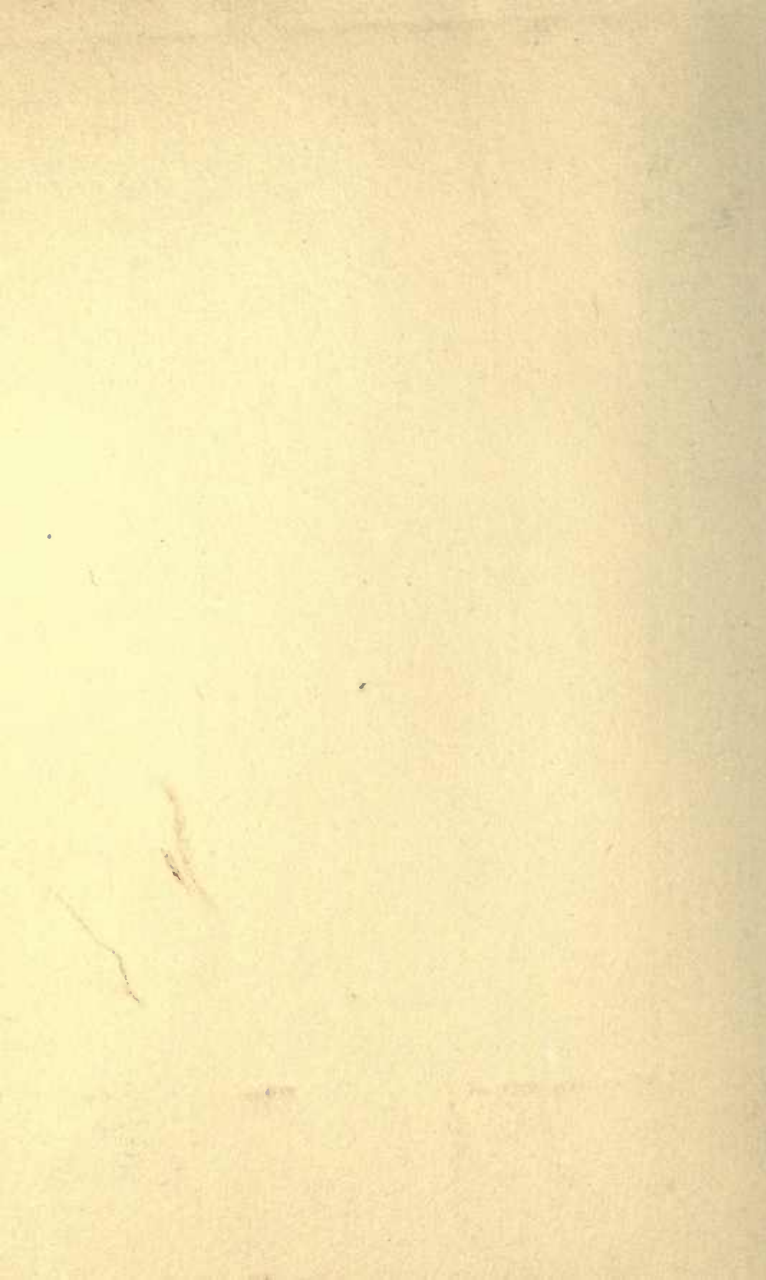
"As ever,

"RAD."

"What does he mean?" asked Nancy, reading the note from the shelter of her lover's arm.

"He'll tell you at dinner, Rose of the World, in his own whimsical way."

THE END



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